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ANIMADVERSIONS

ON

THE REV. MR. FLETCHER'S

DEFENCE

OF HIS

SCRIPTURE-LOYALIST.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES STATED, AND SHORTLY ILLUSTRATED.

THE STATE OF THE QUESTION, BETWEEN SECEDERS AND DISSENTERS,
ON THE HEAD OF MAGISTRACY, ASCERTAINED, FROM THEIR
RESPECTIVE WRITINGS.

THE ARGUMENT DIVESTED OF SUCH THINGS, AS ARE, EVIDENTLY,
FOREIGN TO THE SUBJECT.

DISSENTING-PRINCIPLES SHEWN TO BE CONSISTENT WITH
THE SAFETY AND HAPPINESS OF HUMAN SOCIETY.

AND THE BIBLE FOUND TO BE THE STANDARD OF OUR CONDUCT;
IN EVERY STATION OF LIFE, WHETHER CIVIL, OR RELIGIOUS.

By JOHN REID,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN LAWRIESTON.

Love the truth and peace. ZECH. viii. 19.

*Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason
of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.* 1 PET. iii. 15.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Author of these Animadversions is fully sensible, that the subject, on which he hath ventured to offer his thoughts to the public, is, at this time, exceedingly unpopular. The prevailing opinions, and common prejudices of the age, are evidently against him. Some few, it is hoped, may still be found, who will allow him an attentive, and candid perusal. From these he expects every reasonable indulgence; trusting, that general assertions will not be over-strained, nor forced conclusions drawn from them; and that doubtful words, or detached expressions will not be too severely handled, without carefully comparing one place with another, and attending to the general scope.

It was not without considerable reluctance, that he took the pen, in this controversy. The reluctance, however, did not arise from any conviction of a bad cause, or persuasion of its being indefensible. He is aware, there are many, who reckon it almost impossible to believe, that Dissenting Ministers can be sincere in their profession; hence they, very uncharitably, charge them, with wilfully leading their people astray. But for himself, he can honestly declare, and, so far as he knows, the same is the case with all his Brethren, that the longer he revolves the subject, from year to year, in his own mind, the more closely he attends unto it; the more deeply convinced he is, that the declarative glory of God, and the happiness of mankind, are concerned in the cause, for which he pleads. The personal infirmities of its professors are abundantly numerous, and mournfully great; yet the cause itself seems plainly to have the sanction of a "Thus saith the Lord." Did he not, seriously and candidly, think so; he never should wish to defend it. But the Author's reluctance arose from the consideration, of having little or no prospect, of making matters any better, or of bringing the dispute to a comfortable issue. Naturally averse to litigation, and seeing no
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propriety in arguing for arguing's sake; he felt disposed, after what hath already been advanced, on both sides of the question, rather to let the controversy sleep, and leave the candid public, from henceforth, to judge for themselves. But various concurring circumstances have led him, step by step, into the undertaking. Besides other things, which need not be mentioned, the gratifying of fellow-professors, who still wished to see something farther, in reply to Mr. FLETCHER's Defence; respect for the memory of our deceased Brother, who is no more to answer for himself; and the vindication of, what appeared to him to be, one, though only one, of the important articles, in that sacred depositum, long entrusted with the Reformed Church of Scotland, at length prevailed with him, to submit a few thoughts to the public.

SOME will, probably, be surpris'd to find, that Dissenters write so much on Magistracy, and so little on other subjects. It is not, surely, because they find more pleasure in treating that, than in treating other subjects, or reckon it of superior importance to other things; but the obvious reason is, because the head of Magistracy is that, on which they have been most frequently, and violently, attacked, especially since the commencement of the Secession: the law of self-defence, therefore hath oblig'd them to be often in the field.

As to the present state of the dispute; if the reader wish to have the subject properly before him; it will be requisite to read, first the particular Section of the Defence, animadverted upon; and then, the Animadversions on that Section; together with the authorities quoted, at the bottom of the page. Having read, with candour, and impartiality, and having carefully compared the whole with the unerring standard; let him decide, as he may find cause.

INTRODUCTION,

Containing a few General Principles; which, it is hoped, may be of service, towards the right stating, and the terminating of the Controversy.

EVERY person, of discernment, will readily perceive, that no dispute can be managed, with propriety, unless we have some first principles, on which we all along proceed; some things freely granted, on both sides, and always considered as needing no further proof. Were this duly attended to, such principles properly ascertained, and the terms, used in the stating of questions, carefully explained, before we proceed; it is presumed that, at least, the one half of the disputes, amongst Christians, might soon be at an end. But while there is no fixed principle, steadily adhered unto, and while terms are freely used, now in one sense, and then in another, without ever apprizing the reader; it is simply impossible to decide the controversy.

HAVING these views, it is hoped, the reader will be pleased to attend unto the few following propositions; which, being once confirmed, and held as established maxims; the controversy, between Seceders and Dissenters, may be the more easily terminated. Their subserviency to this purpose will afterwards appear.

PROPOSITION I.

THE Holy Scriptures, wherever they are enjoyed, should be considered, and applied, as a complete rule of faith and practice, to all descriptions of men, in every department of human life.

Owing to the depravity of our nature, by the fall, "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." * The dictates of his natural judgment and conscience, unassisted by the heavenly Oracles, are altogether insufficient to guide his feet in the path of duty; either in one station, or another.

In compassion to this mournful condition, the Lord, our Lawgiver, hath favoured us with a very full, and clear revelation of his will, in the Holy Scriptures. This Revelation, evidently, contains necessary, and suitable directions for human conduct, in every station and capacity, from the king on the throne, to the meanest beggar in the cottage.

It is indisputable, that kings, and other civil magistrates, of old, were positively required, to have a copy of the divine law continually by them, to read in it, all the days of their life, and to rule their people, according to it. † The Scripture regulation ever was, "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." ‡ When the sweet psalmist of Israel prayed, "Order my steps in thy word," † he certainly wished it might be the case, in his public official capacity, as well as in more private station. Concerning the ministers of religion, this is the honourable character, "They have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law." § And to persons of every description, in both the higher, and lower circles of life, the language of inspiration is, "To the law and to the testimony;

* Jer. x. 23. † Deut. xvii. 18,—20. Josh. i. 8.

‡ 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. † Psal. cxix. 133. § Deut. xxxiii. 9, 10.

mony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." * These laws respect not outward washings, purifications, sacrifices, feast-days, or other ceremonial observances, emphatically styled, *carnal ordinances*, imposed upon the church, until the times of reformation only: no, surely; they respect the mental endowments, moral character, and righteous conduct of men, towards God, and towards one-another.

To convince us that, in their true spirit and scope, these are standing moral precepts, still in force, the New Testament-Scripture teaches, substantially, the same things. There too, the necessary qualifications, and official duties of civil magistrates, as well as those of gospel ministers, are clearly unfolded; while the duties of husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant, and of equals one to another, are also described, in words which the same Divine Spirit, who actuated the prophets of old, teacheth. † The general, and infallible assertion, concerning the Holy Scripture, is, that "It is all given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." ‡ The latitude of expression here deserves our special notice, "unto all good works." Whatever good deed he may be called to perform, and in whatever capacity he may be required to act still let him consider the inspired Oracles, as the great source of his information, and the rule, which God hath given for his direction, Besides, it is expressly declared, that "As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." †

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* Isa. viii. 20. † Rom. xiii. 1. 3. 4. Eph. vi. Col. iii. &c.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

† Rom. ii. 12.

PROPOSITION II.

THINGS are right, or wrong, in their own nature, and as determined by the divine law; independent of the will of any man, or class of men, however numerous.

It is granted, that there are actions, such as the taking away of a man's life, on which, while barely considered as things done, we cannot well pronounce, whether they be right, or wrong, till once they be clothed with their various circumstances. But after taking into the account the station and character of the agent, the springs of action, the manner of proceeding, the law transgressed, or obeyed, together with the tendency, and native consequences of the deed, and bringing the whole to the unerring standard; then they must be considered as right or wrong, according as they agree, or disagree with that standard: though some should approve, and others condemn, and on whatever side the majority should be found. It is self-evident, that the will, or choice, of the creature can never make that straight, which God hath made crooked, nor the contrary.

Concerning this, the language of Scripture is plain and unequivocal. Hence we are told, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." * We read of some who "call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight." And yet they are charged with "casting away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despising the word of the Holy One of Israel." † Saul of Tarsus thought that he was doing God good service, when he was persecuting the saints; and might have found thousands, and ten thousands to concur with him, in that opinion. Yea, in much later times, the great majority of many nations, at once, have

* Prov. xiv. 12.

† Isa. v. 20, 21, 24.

have, with apparent sincerity, held such doctrine; and their conscience seems to have approved. *

Amidst a great variety of subordinate standards, it is necessary, that there should always be some general, and unerring standard; to which the rest may be brought, and by which they may be adjusted. The natural dictates of right reason, as they are called, in the consciences of men, the decrees of councils, the usages of nations, the deeds of bodies politic, and such like, can never be viewed in any other light, than as subordinate fallible rules. They are often at variance amongst themselves; and therefore can never, by themselves, be a sufficient rule for human conduct, neither in one station, nor another. Hence it is plain, that, in order to ascertain whether things be right, or wrong, it is not enough that we find them to be sanctioned by a majority; but we must carefully consider their nature and tendency, and bring them, ultimately, to the unalterable standard of righteousness.

PROPOSITION III.

As they, to whom much is given, will have more required of them, than will be of those, who never had any such light, nor means of knowledge; there can be no conclusive reasoning, from the one case, to the other.

Positively speaking, indeed, "Every sin, being against the sovereignty, goodness, and holiness of God, and against his righteous law, deserveth his wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come;" it cannot, however, be refused, that the same evils are, comparatively, less, and much more excusable, in the case of a people who never knew any better, than they are in the case of such as have been remarkably enlightened, openly professed the truth, and solemnly sworn adherence unto it. This is so exceedingly plain, from our Saviour's own doctrine, that none, who believe him to be

* When Popery was at its height.

be the true and faithful Witness, can possibly deny it. "Unto whomsoever much is given," says he, "of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." * And again, "If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." † Their sin had been, comparatively, much less; but now, having enjoyed the best means of information, by the clear shining of the true light, they are altogether inexcusable; their sin is much more aggravated; they have much more to account for. The forecited passage, in the Epistle to the Romans, teaches the same doctrine, "As many as have sinned without the law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." ‡ Superior light shall occasion an answerable account to be given.

Following the dictates of their own conscience, and guided by the dim taper of nature's light, even the Heathen, who are without the Scripture-Law, may do many things materially good, and substantially the same with those things which are required of Christians. But the question is not, what is, or may be done, by them; but what is expected of us, who are favoured with the clear sun-shine of Divine Revelation, to guide our feet in the way of righteousness?

PROPOSITION IV.

Human society, in general, is, or at least ought to be, formed by mutual consent, either tacitly or expressly given; and not by compulsion, or one party lording it over the conscience of another.

Society hath been very justly defined, "A number of rational and moral beings, united for their common preservation and happiness." † Is man indeed a rational being; then his will or choice should certainly be influenced,

* Luke xii. 48

† John xv. 22.

‡ Rom. ii. 12.

† Encycl. Brit. New Edit. on Society.

fluenced, not by force, but by the dictates of a well informed understanding; while his understanding should receive its information from the revealed will of God; "The entrance of whose words giveth light; and giveth understanding unto the simple."* If this be refused, it must be done at the expence of degrading man from his high rank, in the scale of existence, and classing him with the gregarious beasts of the field; which come together, by natural instinct, or the compulsory measures of their rigorous lords. Hence, the authors of the above definition very properly observe, "There are shoals of fishes, herds of quadrupeds, and flocks of birds. We call crows and beavers, and several other species of animals, *gregarious*; but it is hardly good English to say that they are *social*."† Nor would it, surely, be much better English to say, that a reasonable, moral, and free agent should be forcibly obliged to enter into society, upon conditions, which his judgment can by no means approve, after all the pains which he can take, to receive the best information.

None, it is hoped, will deny, that, strictly and properly speaking, JEHOVAH alone is Lord of the conscience. It is his sole prerogative to search the heart, and try the reins. If so, whosoever takes it upon him, to force another into measures, which he cannot possibly approve, undoubtedly usurps the prerogative of the Most High. There is no inconsistency in using Scriptural arguments, and rational means, to remove his objections, and reason him into compliance; but to compel he hath no power.

The Scripture seems plainly to teach the same doctrine, while it says, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?"‡ Interrogations of this kind, it is well known, imply the strongest negative; as much as to say, it is quite inconsistent, it is altogether unreasonable, ever to expect, that two persons, at variance between themselves, should have the benefit, and the comfort of social intercourse by the way; or, that they should heartily combine their counsels; and unite their
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* Psal. cxix. 130.

† Id.

‡ Amos iii. 3.

best endeavours, to prosecute a measure, concerning which they hold opposite opinions, the one approving, and the other condemning: no, surely; they must first understand one another, before they can act in concert.

Human authorities are also on our side. The generality of sensible writers appear to hold this sentiment, that society is formed by consent. One may be mentioned, instead of many, who speak to the same purpose. "We understand by society" says he, "the consent of two or more persons in the same end, and the same means requisite to obtain that end; wherefore, while such consent lasts, there is society. And so soon as they who had formerly consented in the same end and means, begin to propose and pursue each his own end, that society is broke and dissolved."*

PROPOSITION V.

DEPARTURE from former laudable attainments, is a great evil, severely threatened in the Holy Scriptures; and that for which every one, who is guilty, must be accountable to the Righteous Judge of all the earth.

The Spirit of truth assures us, "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." † Once enlightned, and having openly professed the truth; they cannot now plead the excuse of ignorance; they stand self-condemned, in the presence of God, and before the world: their case is exceedingly dangerous.

This is one of the great and atrocious evils, for which God often threatened, and at last severely punished his ancient Israel. By the mouth of his prophet Jeremiah, he takes particular notice of their former attainments; and he marks their departure from them, in language of the strongest reprehension. They were once highly esteemed of the Lord, for "The kindness of their youth, the love of their espousals, and their going after him in the

* Turnbull's Heineccius, Vol. 2. p. 10. † 2 Pet. ii. 21.

the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase." But, on account of their apostacy, they were thus challenged, "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" In JEHOVAH'S displeasure, they are told, "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters; and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." To convince us that the disease was epidemical, that all ranks, from the throne to the cottage, were involved in the apostacy, and that backsliding in the state, as well as in the church, is condemned and severely punished by God, we are told, "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed, they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets." The evil shall not go unpunished; they must be accountable for the transgression: "Thine own wickedness," saith the Righteous Judge, "shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God."*. That divine injunction, "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing," † also proclaims the truth of the proposition; and may be justly considered as having for its object, every commendable, and scriptural attainment, whether in civil, or religious society. Nor can it be refused, that, the Redeemer's solemn warning to the church of Sardis, is full and pointed to our purpose: "Remember," says he, "how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I shall come upon thee." ‡

* Jer. ii. 2, 3. 5. 13. 26. & 19th verses. † Phil. iii. 16.

‡ Rev. iii. 3.

PROPOSITION VI.

THEY, who consent unto the unrighteous deeds of others, are chargeable with guilt, as well as the principal actors.

This is a maxim held sacred, in all well regulated courts of judgment, amongst men. *Socii criminis*, or accomplices in the guilt, are justly considered as objects of the law; and punishable for their consenting, and being aiding to the crime, though they may not have been the actual perpetrators thereof. Hence libels usually state, "That such and such persons have been guilty actors, or art and part: have concurred, or been aiding and assisting in the wickedness specified."

The proposition likewise receives countenance, from the Oracles of truth. There the despisers of the divine law are sharply reprov'd, not simply for the more direct acts of sin, committed by themselves; but also for consenting to the wicked deeds of others: "When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers."* What is said, concerning these two atrocious evils, will hold with respect to any other sin whatever. Consenting unto any sin, or doing what necessarily involves an approbation of it, must ever be reckoned criminal, in the sight of God. It is recorded, to the infamy of Saul of Tarsus, in his state of non-conversion, that when the proto-martyr Stephen was slain, "Saul was consenting unto his death."† Though it doth not appear, that he took any active part in the perpetration of the deed. And, as a beautiful contrast of his conduct, it is spoken to the lasting honour of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, that when the rest conspired against the Lord of glory, and agreed to have him put to death, "He had not consented to the counsel and deed of them."‡ He exoner'd his own conscience, by openly declaring his disapprobation of their procedure.

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* Psal. l. 18. † Acts viii. 1. ‡ Luke xxiii. 51.

The words of an inspired prophet, on this subject, are very remarkable, "The Lord," says he, "spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me, that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy." * Approve not their evil counsels, consent not to their unrighteous deeds, neither hearken unto their ensnaring advices. The express injunction of Heaven is, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment." † Here we are commanded, not to suffer ourselves to be influenced by the voice of a majority, in a bad cause; we are positively forbidden, to decline after them, or give our consent to their unrighteous determinations.

PROPOSITION VII.

THERE are two general kinds of subjection, to superior power; that which is passive or constrained, dictated by imperious necessity, on account of the ascendancy which the existing power hath obtained over the subject; and that which is voluntary, deliberate, and conscientious, arising from a lawful moral relation, between the superior and the inferior; which relation, among those who have the power of free agency, and enjoy the Word of God as a "lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path," must ever be formed on rational and moral principles, or conditions, otherwise the authority can never bind the conscience of a moral agent.

It will not, surely, be refused, that there is a striking difference, between the servitude of the bond-slave, who reluctantly submits to the stern authority of his haughty lord, finding himself obliged, contrary to his will, and oftentimes beyond his proper ability, to serve with rigour, all the days of his life, without any just recompence for his labour; and the voluntary obedience of the hired servant, who enters into his master's service, in virtue of a mutual pacton, plainly stipulating what,

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* Isa. viii. 11, 12.

† Exod. xxiii. 2.

in general at least, is the work to be done, what shall be the term, and what the conditions of the service. In the one case, the connection of master and servant is founded in cruelty and injustice; in the other, the relation is formed by mutual consent. The one master hath no legal claim at all on the obedience of his subject; the other hath a just title to conscientious obedience, natively resulting from the pactio, between him and his inferior. In the former case, man is treated either as a criminal, or as one of the brutal creation; in the later, he is considered as a reasonable being, and free agent. In both the cases, indeed, the things done by the servant may often be materially the same; yet formally viewed, as clothed with all its qualifying circumstances, the subjection yielded is specifically different. From the one obedience is extorted, by the mere dint of superior, and, as to him, irresistible power; while the other voluntarily obeys, in consequence of a rational agreement, between him and his superior. If all this be admitted, as reason certainly says it should; then the distinction, marked in the proposition, cannot, consistently be refused.

The inspired Apostle evidently favours the distinction, when he says, "Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." * These words, indeed, suggest, and it is freely granted, that in the same case, the subjection may be of a mixed kind, partly passive or constrained, and partly voluntary; *i. e.* the subject, in yielding obedience, may be influenced, both by the consideration of fear, and a sense of duty. But what we contend for, at present, is, that these things are distinct, in their nature. If the subject, in obeying, have no other spring of action than imperious necessity, and the fear of a power, which he cannot possibly resist; his case is surely very different from what it would be, did he feel the force of a moral obligation, upon his conscience, in virtue of a lawful relation, between him and his superior, and because of JEHOVAH's command, to be subject unto the higher power; *i. e.* unto lawfully

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* Rom. xiii, 5.

constituted authority. Agreeably to this, we are led to distinguish between usurped power, and lawful authority; between the wrong and the right manner of going to work, in forming the relation of superior and inferior; and between the terms, corresponding to these, passive subjection, and voluntary obedience for conscience' sake.

It is self-evident that every moral obligation must originally spring from the authority of God, as the great Sovereign of the universe. And if so, it would be exceedingly absurd to suppose, that any human authority, assumed, on conditions directly contrary to his revealed will, should, notwithstanding, bind the conscience of his reasonable offspring; who are expressly required to take his Holy Word as the standard of their faith and practice.

PROPOSITION VIII.

SOCIETIES, or individuals, having once publicly, and solemnly vowed unto the Most High God; and still, after the strictest enquiry, remaining satisfied in their own mind, that their vows were scriptural; should seriously endeavour to act up to the true spirit and intention of these vows; and no power upon earth, nor any class of men, whether majority, or minority, in a nation, can ever possibly dissolve the obligation.

The obligation of every consistent and scriptural vow, or religious covenant, which is much the same, hath justly been considered as having something very sacred in it. The reason is obvious: the sovereign authority of *JEHOVAH*, is interposed, in requiring this duty of his people; while his great and dreadful name is solemnly invoked, in thus obeying his will. "Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God," * is the unequivocal language of the divine law. The duty, indeed, is confessedly occasional; *i. e.* the consistency, and propriety, of actually entering into formal vows, or covenants, arise, in a great measure, out of the circumstances, in which the party is placed. But having once come into these

* Psal. lxxvi. 11.

these circumstances; the law requires the proper improvement of them, in this manner. And the party, having endeavoured so to do; the same law requires the conscientious performance of that which he hath vowed. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed." † Hence, it is clear as noon-day, that, strictly and properly speaking, the obligation always flows from the divine authority of the great Lawgiver. And therefore, though it be but a man's covenant; yet if it contain nothing, neither in matter, nor manner, but what is agreeable to the spirit and scope of the Holy Scriptures; its obligation should ever be held sacred. It is not, we confess, simply considered as the deed of men binding themselves and their posterity, that it affects our conscience; but formally viewed as the deed, which the Lord himself required to be done; as the vow, or covenant, which he commanded his people to make; and which, having been once made, he, no less expressly, commands them, conscientiously, to fulfil. Those, therefore, who feel the weight of such obligations on their conscience, and are afraid, "After vows to make enquiry," ‡ may well be excused.

Had I a proper opportunity of converse with Mr. Fletcher, and the rest of our Seceding Brethren; I should wish much to know, before we proceeded any farther, whether or not, they would grant the above general principles. To me it is a matter of no consequence whether they reckon them in point, or foreign to the purpose; providing that they only allow them to be just and true, in themselves. If they do; I seek no other *data*, in reasoning the matter, between them and us: but if they refuse any, or all of them; I should like to hear their objections, with the reasons and illustrations of them. Meanwhile, till these appear, I hope, that I shall now be allowed to take the propositions for granted. Accordingly, aided by them, I shall venture a few remarks, on the several sections of Mr. Fletcher's Defence.

ANIMAD.

† Eccl. v. 4.

‡ Prov. xx. 25.

ANIMADVERSIONS, &c.

I AM extremely sorry to find, that the very Title-page of our opponent's Performance affords room for animadversion. It runs thus: "The Scripture-Loyalist defended, from unfair and false reasoning: with a refutation of false glosses imposed on several passages of the Holy Scriptures: and a detection of falsehoods, calumnies, misrepresentations and contradictions." Surly-looking epithets, indeed! Here the prejudices of the reader are evidently bespoke, before-hand. His humours and passions are addressed, rather than his judgment and conscience. It was surely time enough for Mr. Fletcher to have given these names, to his opponent's arguments, after he had brought them to the bar, fairly tried them, and proved them to be false. Then, indeed, with some appearance of reason, he might have deduced it, as a necessary inference, from the full and clear proof which he had led, that Mr. Steven's reasonings deserved no better names than these. But Mr. Fletcher's mode of procedure, is by no means candid; nor will it be easy for any man to show, that his Title-page breathes a christian spirit, or exhibits an inclination, to compose differences. Mr. Steven goes to work in another manner. He, as every modest disputant should, gives the same names, which his opponent himself had given; and, accordingly, entitles his Letter, "Answers to twelve Queries." It would have been equally easy for him to have said, "Answers to twelve Sophistical Quibbles." And, in doing so, he would have trode exactly in the same path with Mr. Fletcher, as every person, capable of comparing without prejudice, must see at once; but he has not thought it proper to do so. And, I hope, neither will his surviving brethren: for unless we mean fairly to combat the reasoning, and candidly meet the arguments of our opposers, with christian temper; it would be much better to drop the pen altogether.

ANIMADVERSIONS ON SECTION I.

IN this section of the Defence, the complaints against the Letter are, “ Copiation ; having as the scope, not to refute the doctrine taught by the Loyalist, but to combat the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance ; indulging in passion, invective, and railing accusations ; stooping below the good sense of a scholar and divine, by mentioning country-clatters ; mistaking the dispute between Seceders and the Reformed Presbtery ; making an Erastian appeal ; and artfully concealing the point in debate.” †

If by copiation be meant, advocating the same cause which is stated and defended in the Testimony, and its Vindications ; and, in some few instances, using, substantially, the same arguments, though always stated and illustrated, in the author’s own way, except where he professedly quotes, in so many words ; if this be all that is meant by copiation ; nothing other was ever intended ; nor could ever the author of the Letter, without it, have written, rationally, and consistently, upon the same subject, on which others had written before him. But if by copiation be understood, as the word seems rather to import, a servile imitation of others, and transcribing, almost word for word, from their books, without apprizing the reader ; it is hoped, that Mr. Fletcher himself, upon second thoughts, will find, there is not the least shadow of any such copiation, from beginning to end of the Letter ; nor has he been able to produce a single instance, in support of the charge. But might not our friend have spared this reflection ? considering that he himself often writes the same things over and over, in a very servile manner. A striking instance of which the attentive reader will find, by comparing the 6th Section and Conclusion of the Loyalist, p. 49. and 52. 2d. Edit. with the Conclusion of the Defence.

Mr.

† Def. p. 5, — 11.

Mr. Fletcher affects to be very much perplexed, about the general scope and design of the Letter. He hesitates whether it has any determinate scope, but if it has, supposes it to be, "To combat the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance." p. 6th. And again, "To prove that the British Government is unlawful, and therefore should be disowned." p. 13. But there is not the least ground for hesitation in the matter. The intention of the Letter is clear as noon-day; namely, To answer Twelve Queries, proposed by Mr. Fletcher. We shall, no doubt, be told, if that be the design; it is yet unaccomplished; the Queries still remain unanswered. But concerning this, the judicious and unbiassed part of mankind, after carefully reading both publications, must think for themselves. Meanwhile, it is easy to perceive, that he who appears first, in a controversy, has the liberty of adopting what plan he thinks most proper, for his performance; while he, whose part it is to reply, must necessarily follow his opponent, into his various strong holds of resort. If, therefore, Mr. Fletcher be not pleased with the general scope of the Letter; if he complain, that the true state of the question is mistaken; he cannot but see, that he has himself wholly to blame. The Loyalist is, undoubtedly, attended, in his different motions; while, to illustrate and prove his doctrine, he one while leads us to Egypt, the house of bondage and slavery; another while, to the land of Israel, under her own government, and her own kings, but in a state of awful degeneracy; now to Babylon, the scene of tyrannical oppression, and impious insult; and then, to the land of Judea, while a province of the Roman Empire, under the yoke of the monstrously wicked, and blood-thirsty Nero; and while, to crown the whole, he conducts us to Golgotha, and calls us to take a view of the suffering Redeemer, humbling himself, in the room, and for the sake of his people, and thus becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross.* If the sub-

* Compare Sect. 1st. & 7d. of the Scrip. Loy. with the corresponding answers in the Letter.

subjection, in general, which was yielded in the above cases, be not what we properly call, passive obedience and non-resistance; let the impartial reader judge. Now, if the Letter from Crookedholm had nothing to do with passive obedience and non-resistance, unless it had been addressed to Mr. Hobbs,* or some one of his stamp; it is surely difficult to see, what Mr. Fletcher had to do, to submit to the consideration of its author, these striking instances of passive obedience and non-resistance; unless he meant to defend the same cause, for which Mr. Hobbs contends. To deduce arguments, for enforcing and illustrating the doctrine of voluntary and conscientious obedience to lawful authority, from cases of the most abject slavery, is not, certainly, altogether consistent †.

Invective, passion, and railing accusation, are also charges against the Letter; and some extracts are given, to substantiate the charge. Meanwhile, it is confidently asserted, that "Seceders who fear God, will not render evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing; and they will not offer strange fire on God's altar, lest they be consumed." ‡ It is evidently agreed, by both parties, that, in managing our disputes, the wrath of man is altogether improper, and can never work the righteousness of God. The only question is, unto what side the charge more properly belongs. Mr. Fletcher it seems, can see nothing of it in his Defence; and certainly the Author of the Letter saw, at least as little appearance of it, in his Pamphlet. And, indeed, it is very difficult for either the one, or the other, to judge impartially, in his own cause. The matter, therefore, must be, ultimately, referred to Him, who searches the heart, and tries the reins; and whose judgment is always according to truth. And, in as far as mankind are concerned, the impartial and discerning public must, and no doubt will, judge for themselves. It is but reasonable, however, that they should have the evidence on both sides. And as Mr. Fletcher has thought it proper, to give some extracts, from the Letter, as specimens

* Def. p. 6. † See Intro. prop. 7. ‡ Def. p. 6, 7, 8.

mens of invective and railing accusation; he can have no objections unto the producing of some extracts, from the Defence too, for a similar purpose. This mode of proceeding, by collecting detached sentences, would certainly be very unfair, on either side, were the design to ascertain the author's meaning; but this is not pretended; it is only to shew the manner. The following expressions will be found in the Defence.

‘ From your profound silence about the cardinal point
 ‘ in debate, it is probable that you have deserted the
 ‘ Reformed, and are come over to the Seceding camp;
 ‘ but it is far more probable, that *save thyself*, is the
 ‘ parent of this silence.—I will not follow you through
 ‘ your whirlwind of noisy and vain declamation, against
 ‘ a spectre of your own raising.—The vain janglings
 ‘ and perverse disputings of the Reformed Brethren.—
 ‘ This reasoning has driven Mr. Steven again to his dernier
 ‘ resort, to the strong-hold of magistracy in the abstract.
 ‘ Scripture, reason, and common sense, must all bow
 ‘ to this metaphysical idol.—Every man, possessed of
 ‘ common sense, must see, that this comment is a bare-
 ‘ faced falsehood.—Advocates for error have great need
 ‘ of good memories, to prevent their falling into the
 ‘ mire of contradictions; and Mr. Steven's memory has
 ‘ greatly failed him.—This odd sense is such a gross
 ‘ perversion of a plain precept, it wears an aspect so surly
 ‘ and forbidding, that you are ashamed of it, and there-
 ‘ fore laid it down at your neighbour's door; but it is
 ‘ now returned to you and the Reformed Presbytery,
 ‘ as the right owners.—Much of your Letter consists
 ‘ of manifest contradictions, which would tempt one to
 ‘ think that it was written, not by one, but by several
 ‘ persons not of one mind; and that it was put to the
 ‘ press by one, who had not ability to discern, that one
 ‘ part of it was hostile to another.—You might have
 ‘ seen, with your eyes half open.—You durst not look
 ‘ the seventh Query in the face, because it hath a respect
 ‘ to an article in the creed of the Reformed Presbytery,
 ‘ which is exceedingly erroneous, or rather blasphem-
 ‘ ous; and therefore should never have been named
 ‘ amongst

‘ amongst Christians. The diabolical article is this, &c.--
 ‘ These sayings have no more respect to the Query, than
 ‘ to the Popish doctrine of baptizing bells, and conjuring
 ‘ spirits.—Your answer to the eighth Query, consists
 ‘ of falsehood and error, which are mighty weapons
 ‘ in your warfare, and always ready.—You durst not
 ‘ attempt to prove your political principles from the
 ‘ Word of God, because it would have been an attempt
 ‘ to prove, that rebellion, which is as the sin of witch-
 ‘ craft, is authorized in the holy Oracles.’ * To these
 we may add a few bold assertions from the Loyalist.
 ‘ The Reformed Presbytery are not found in the faith.—
 ‘ They are not going forth by the approved footsteps of
 ‘ the flock of Christ.—They do not reduce their own
 ‘ principles to practice. They are not going forth by
 ‘ the footsteps of the flock of Christ in Scotland in re-
 ‘ forming times.—And, they are not rendering to God,
 ‘ according to the benefit done unto them.’ † If, agree-
 ably to Mr. Fletcher’s profession, the above be the good,
 which Seceders, who fear God, render for evil, the bles-
 sings, which they return, for the railing they receive;
 what must their revilings be!—Ah! dear Sir, can you
 calmly sit down, lay your hand upon your breast, look
 up with holy reverence to the throne of the omniscient
 God, and deliberately say, there is no appearance of
 strange fire, in any of the above extracts, no invective,
 no railing accusation; and, at the same time, affirm,
 that the Letter from Crookedholm abounds in these?
 No, surely; I hope our Friend will never run the awful
 risk. Alas! how readily do our treacherous hearts de-
 ceive us! How blind are we to our own faults! Good
 were it for us all; if we conscientiously regarded our
 Lord’s advice, “ First cast out the beam out of thine
 own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out
 the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” ‡ Consistent with
 the high encomium, which Mr. Fletcher is pleased to
 pass upon himself and his brethren, I charitably hope
 that there are many, among Seceders, as well as in other
 socie-

* Def. p. 10. 12. 28. 36. 42. 62. 65. 80. 83, 84, 85. 92.

† Scrip. Loy. p. 20,—24.

‡ Matk. vii. 5.

societies of professing Christians, who truly "fear God;" but perhaps it might have said as much for his modesty, if he had attended to the divine injunction, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." * And he might certainly have exhibited some better evidence, in the cause, than the language, I am very sorry, necessity obliges me to call it, the taunting and sneering language of the above extracts.

As to the very loud complaint of "publishing country-clatters," † though, in this instance, it cannot be denied, that they were well-attested stubborn facts; the Author of the Letter, p. 4th. allows, that he "should have judged such things in themselves altogether unworthy of notice;" and assigns his reasons why they are adduced by him. And indeed there can be very little propriety in descending to notice such things, either on the one side, or on the other. The openly avowed principles, of a body at large, are not to be measured, by the disallowed practice of the individual. Meanwhile, the very strange conduct, which provoked to make this notification from the press, is certainly no less blameable. And for my own part, I should be exceedingly happy to find all such practices, and the publishing them unto the world, buried together in the same grave; never more to be known amongst Christians.

In the 9th page of the Defence, the charge of an Erasian appeal is introduced, with an air of remarkable triumph; while it is supposed that Mr. Steven has "betrayed the cause of the Reformed Presbtery into the hands of its enemies." But the attentive reader will easily perceive, that the author of the Letter from Crookedholm does not, strictly speaking, give up the cause, neither into the hands of the British Rulers, nor into any other hands: only, to express his very strong conviction, of having common sense, and the ordinary reason of mankind, on his side, he signifies, that he would not object, to the submitting of the controversy, even to them, providing it were
fairly

* Prov. xxvii. 2.

† Def. p. 8.

fairly stated; and risks an opinion, that the issue would be favourable to his side of the question. But whether or not, he might be mistaken, in that opinion, were the experiment to be made, doth not at all affect the merits of the cause. Meanwhile, it is truly astonishing, that the appeal, even supposing it had been actually and formally made, should be called "Grossly Erastian."*

Taking Mr. Fletcher upon his own terms; the question is "about obedience to the lawful authority of the present British Magistrates." † If that be not a political question; language has surely lost its meaning. But what connection, the submitting of a political question; to political men, acting in their political capacity can have with Erastianism, very few, I apprehend, will ever be able to see. Is this indeed to give the keys of Christ's spiritual kingdom into the hands of the civil magistrate? Or, in other words, to allow him a directive and authoritative power, in the discipline and government of the the church; reserving, to the ministers of religion, only a persuasive and consultative power? Certainly not. When the Apostle Paul, on account of his stedfast adherence to the truths of the gospel, was arraigned before the Roman Governor of Cæsarea, and accused of sedition, heresy, and temple-profanation; it will not be refused that the question partly respected civil things; yet, taken complexly, one should think, that it had at least as much the appearance of a religious controversy, as the question about "obedience to the British Magistrates:" notwithstanding, the Apostle, finding himself grossly abused, and wickedly imposed upon, by his Jewish brethren, appeals the cause to Cæsar, the Roman Emperor; in expectation that perhaps more justice might be got from him, though also an enemy to the religion of Jesus. ‡ It is hoped that Mr. Fletcher will never think of bringing a charge of Erastianism, against that eminent minister of the New Testament; though, in a case still more foreign to the subject, he brings it, with much confidence, against the author of the Letter from Crookedholm.

* Def. p. 10. † Def. p. 9. ‡ Acts xxiii. xxiv. & xxv. Chap.

Having expressed a hope, that the Reformed Presbytery would censure his opponent, for what is called his "injudicious and Erastian appeal," Mr. Fletcher also expects "That he will return to the good old Protestant doctrine, *That the supreme judge, by which all controversies in religion are to be determined, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures.*"* But is it really meant to apply this good old Protestant rule, to the case in hand? Does Mr. Fletcher himself now think, that the ordinance of civil magistracy, even in a Christian reformed nation, hath such connection with religion, that a dispute about it may be called, "A controversy in religion?" Doth he now believe, that magistracy is to be found in the Bible? Which must unquestionably be the case; if a controversy, concerning it, cannot be properly determined, but in the above manner. But if this be truly his belief; it is difficult to see, how he can, at the same time, teach, that "The doctrine of magistracy appointed in the written Word, is pregnant with absurdities."† Certainly importing, that it is not appointed in the written Word. Now, if it be a just observation, that magistracy is not appointed in the Word; I am afraid that all the Logic in Christendom will be insufficient, to make the appealing of a controversy concerning it, unto political men, to be "grossly Erastian." The objects, about which alone Erastianism is versant, and concerning which it implies an improper interference, are the Scriptural institutions of Christ, as the alone King and Head of his church. Mr. Fletcher, surely, does not mean to make magistracy one of these. Alas! how difficult is it, for even the best of men, to maintain consistency, especially in the heat of dispute!

Concerning the state of the question, Mr. Fletcher declares, that "The dispute between Seceders and the Reformed Presbytery, is not about the nature of civil government; nor about human laws, for the defence of religious and civil liberty; but about obedience to the lawful authority of the present British Magistrates."‡

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* Def. p. 10.

† p. 67.

‡ p. 9.

He complains upon his opponent for “ profound silence about the cardinal point in debate.” † And supposes, “ No man can know from his Letter, whether he be a British Royalist, or a French Democate.” ‡

It seems we must not be allowed to inquire, at least in managing the controversy with our Seceding Brethren, concerning the kind of government, whether it be friendly, or unfriendly to the declarative glory of God, and the religious, or civil, liberties of mankind. But how we can, consistently, argue the propriety, or impropriety, of yielding conscientious obedience, to any given authority, without examining into the nature, and properties, of said authority, or considering, upon what footing it is assumed; I freely confess, it is not easy for me to understand. And it will, I apprehend, be extremely difficult for any man to shew it; unless he mean to revive the justly exploded doctrine, “ That it matters not how the power hath been constituted: if it exist, it hath a just claim to my conscientious obedience, let the conditions, upon which it was assumed, be what they may.” Subscribing, indeed, to this language of absolute power, and passive obedience; we need not much concern ourselves about the kind of authority, to which our subjection is required; but otherwise, it is indispensibly necessary. However, as the true state of the question, is a matter of very special importance, in this, and indeed in every other dispute; the readers patience is humbly craved, while we bring under review, the openly avowed sentiments, of both parties, expressed in their own words; that thus we may learn, how the controversy stands. And as Mr. Fletcher professes to teach, not a different, but the very same doctrine, on the head of civil government, that hath been taught in the Secession since its commencement; we are warranted to consider the Associate Presbytery’s “ Declaration and Defence of their principles anent the present Civil Government,” as expressive of his and his brethren’s sentiments; so long as they do not see it meet to renounce that Declaration and Defence.

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In answer to the question, What sort of kings the people of God are commanded to fear, so as to own their authority, and submit to their just laws, Seceders declare, "It is certain, that they are commanded to fear only such as are acknowledged by the kingdom they are in, while none else are kings with respect to them. In the next place, It is as certain, that they are commanded to fear any whom that kingdom acknowledges as kings, and while they do so." * In further illustrating the text, Prov. xxiv. 21. they say, "In a word, this text doth plainly teach, that the Lord's people, particularly, ought to fear all kings, who are acknowledged as such, by the kingdom they belong to; as there is no exception made here or elsewhere in Scripture." And in the next paragraph, "As there never were, nor could be, any kings acknowledged as such by a kingdom, but who administered some justice; so all the duty of particular subjects, under the worst of these kings, is sufficiently comprehended in this command; as it binds them to acknowledge and submit unto their authority, in any lawful exercise of it, while the kingdom sustains their government." † They allow it leaves them power to testify against the corruptions, and endeavour the reformation of the government. Speaking of men as having a natural inclination to civil society and government, their doctrine is, "Wherever they voluntarily constitute or consent unto any form of civil government, under the rule of any particular persons, whatever sin be in the circumstances of this their deed, with respect to the government or governors which they constitute or consent unto; yet the deed itself, or the substance of the deed, is always in consequence of, and agreeable to God's law; wherefore, their governors, as such and in the substance of the matter, are ordained of God, according to that law." ‡ Again, — "All those who are the ordinance of man, or who have a constitution by the consent of civil society, are to be submitted unto for the Lord's sake, or as having an institution from him." † Proceeding

* Declar. of Prin. p. 57. † p. 59. ‡ p. 70. † p. 76.

ing in the explication of that submission, enjoined by the apostle Peter, they also say, " He orders them to yield such submission, without farther question, to every ordinance of man, every person in civil office by the will of society." † Concerning these precepts, in general, which require obedience to civil rulers, and which they had been considering, as confirming their own principles, anent the government of the times, the summary observation is, " As the precepts that have been explained, are a rule of duty equally toward any who are, and while they are acknowledged as magistrates by civil society; so they are and continue a rule of duty in this matter, particularly to all the Lord's people, in all periods, places and cases.— There is not the least hint in all Scripture, that ever a time should come, or a case fall out, wherein the above precepts should not be a present rule." ‡

I should be very sorry, to pervert our Brethren's words. But if the ordinary grammatical sense, and construction, are to be retained; I humbly apprehend, that the following conclusions, from the above extracts, are fair and necessary.

1st, That whatever may be the case in other departments of human life; yet in the formation of civil society, fixing its fundamental laws, and determining the conditions of bearing rule in it, even those who are favoured with the Word of God, as a lamp unto their feet, and a light unto their path, are not under any positive and indispensable obligation, to apply that standard. At least, though they should entirely lay it aside; and, according to their own fancy, organize their society, and instal their rulers, on principles and conditions, in direct opposition unto it; still their deeds are to be considered as valid; and as justly entitled to the practical approbation of every soul, within the territory. It will be objected, that owning the authority, even thus constituted, doth not necessarily imply an approbation of the evils in the constitution, nor a subscribing to the propriety of these sinful conditions, on which the crown

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is held. Were these evils only versant about some accidental outside-circumstances, or after-acts of mal-administration; the objection might be allowed to have some weight. But when these evils are particularly specified, incorporated into the very ground-work of the constitution, and positively stood upon, as the fundamental conditions of rule; the case is quite altered. Then to speak of owning, in the proper sense of the term, the lawful authority of a ruler, who, in his regal capacity at least, hath no existence, but on the footing of solemnly swearing adherence to certain fundamental laws of the kingdom, over which he reigns; and, at the same time, pretend, that we heartily disapprove, and reckon ourselves bound, in conscience, to testify against these very same fundamental laws; if it be not a contradiction, it is certainly something remarkably like it.

2dly, That, even supposing the case of a nation, about to chuse their rulers, be ever so plainly stated, and the various circumstances of the case ever so distinctly ascertained; yet is it impossible to say, what would constitute lawful authority, in said nation, until the body politic, or civil society signify their will. But if once the sanction of their consent, or of a majority among them, be given, that will legitimate the rule of any person over them; let the said person be, otherwise, what he may, and the conditions of his advancement be as sinful as you please to suppose. For whatever Scripture-rules they despise, whatever former attainments they relinquish, or on whatever principles they go to work; still, it seems, the substance of their deed must be considered, as agreeable to the revealed will of God.

3dly, That, with respect to civil government at least, the case of Heathens, who are totally strangers to the Word of God; and the case of Christians, who have the Bible daily in their hands, and who are expressly required to use it as the standard of their faith and practice, are so very similar, that on whatever conditions the former may admit persons to bear rule over

them, consistently with the knowledge they have; on the very same conditions may the latter lawfully admit their rulers. For wherever, either in Heathen or Christian nation, the consent of civil Society can, once be obtained, that will legitimate the ruler's title to the throne, abstracting from all other considerations whatsoever. To whom much is given, of them, unquestionably, more will be required, than will be of others; but though they should entirely disregard what more is required of them; still, it would appear, their deeds must be considered as valid, and sanctioned by a "Thus saith the Lord."

4tly, That even supposing it should be freely granted, that human society ought to be formed, and the conditions of bearing rule in it fixed, by mutual consent, as to the majority, who happen to be of the same opinion; yet the minority, who may happen to differ from them, have no alternative. With them there is no room for choice. Though, after using the best means of information in their power, they cannot, in judgment and conscience, approve of those fundamental conditions, on which the authority is held and exercised; yet must they own it for conscience' sake. Without any hesitation, they must yield even to such things, as in their very nature, and by the common consent of mankind, necessarily involve a direct recognizing of the existing ruler's title. For these precepts, we are told, requiring subjection to the higher powers, are to be applied, without farther question, by all the Lord's people, in all places and cases, where the will of the majority hath set up rulers. As to that passive subjection, which doth not properly recognize the lawfulness of the title, it is altogether foreign to the subjection in debate. And,

5tly, That the representatives of a nation, in organizing their society, and investing their rulers, may not only disregard the laws of Scripture, but also these corresponding fundamental laws of the state, to which all ranks had solemnly sworn adherence before; and yet be at least thus far blameless, that their public deeds
while

while acting so, should be practically sanctioned by every soul within the realm, in yielding conscientious obedience to that authority, which hath no existence upon any other footing. We shall be told, The authority exists by the will of human society; which is enough. Be it so; but did not that will determine, that the authority should be held and exercised, on certain specified and stipulated conditions; without subscribing, and adhering to which, it should be considered as null and void. Whoever, therefore, acquiesces in the will, thus signified, in doing so, he necessarily approves the object of its choice and determination; and will, I am afraid, be found chargeable with, substantially, the same thing as the principal actor. If any suppose, that these conclusions are not fairly deduced from the premises; it is hoped, they will not content themselves with barely saying so; but, by entering closely into the merits of the cause, will candidly shew where the mistake lies, and how it is, that these things are not inferable from the doctrine of our Seceding Brethren. Till then, we must be allowed to retain our opinion, that they are just and necessary consequences.

In opposition to the doctrine of the above extracts, and the consequences which it necessarily involves; the doctrine of the Reformed Presbytery, on the head of civil government, is as follows,—“God Almighty, the Sovereign Lord of all things, hath, for his own glory and the public good, authorized and instituted in his word the office and ordinance of civil government and governors, for the preservation of external peace and concord, administration of justice, defence and encouragement of such as are, and do good, and punishment of evil doers, who transgress either table of the law.—A due measure of those qualifications which God the great lawgiver requires in his word, together with what other stipulations, according to the same unerring rule, a Christian people, who are blessed with the light of divine revelation, have made the fundamental conditions of civil government among them, are essentially necessary to the constitution and investiture of lawful authority
over

over such a people. No other constitution can be approved by God; nor answer the ends of the ordinance. —The constituting of the relation betwixt rulers and ruled is voluntary and mutual. The lawful constitution of magistrates, is, by the mutual election of the people, and consent of those that are elected, with certain stipulations, according to Scripture and right reason, obliging each other unto the duty of their different stations and relations." *

In this statement the following things are evidently implied, 1st, That not only in other departments of human life; but also in the organizing of civil society, fixing its laws, and determining the conditions of bearing office in it, Christians, who are favoured with Divine Revelation, are indispensibly bound to apply it, as the standard of their conduct. 2^{dly}, That when all the circumstances of a nation's case; with respect to privileges, former attainments, and obligations; are carefully considered, and tried by the unerring standard, it is possible justly to determine what are, and what are not, lawful conditions of investing any person with civil authority over them; even previous to the declaration of the public will, by the representatives of that nation. The conditions of investiture are either right or wrong, independent of their approbation, or disapprobation. 3^{dly}, That our case, as a people blessed with the light of Divine Revelation, and having once reached very high attainments in the state, as well as in the church, must never be compared with the case of the Heathen, who sit in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death. 4^{thly}, That as men are reasonable creatures, and as civil society should be formed, and princes admitted into office, by the consent, and free choice of those, over whom they are to rule; even the minority, in a nation, can never consistently be forced, to fall in with measures, which they do not in judgment approve. In such a case, they should be allowed, freely to dissent from the public deeds of the nation at large; nor ought any other weapons to be used, for reclaiming them, than those of
Scrip-

* Testimony, p. 165. 4th. Edit.

Scripture and reason; so long as they conduct themselves peaceably, and give no disturbance to society. And, 5^{thly}, That all national attainments, calculated to promote the glory of God, and the good of human society, ought to be held sacred; especially when these attainments have been already openly approved, incorporated into the fundamental laws of the state, and adherence unto them solemnly sworn, by all ranks in the kingdom. And although the majority should relinquish said attainments, renounce their vows, and constitute a new society, on principles diametrically opposite to the former: their doing so can never free the conscience of the minority, disapproving of the new constitution, and sincerely wishing still to adhere unto the ancient laws.

By carefully attending to the above contrast of the principles, openly avowed by the respective disputants, it will be easy to see, how the matter stands between them. If all, who are favoured with the Scriptures, be indispensibly bound to apply them, as the rule of their conduct, even in their transactions concerning civil society; Dissenters must be right, in openly refusing their consent to such public deeds of constitution, and corresponding administration, as not only set aside that rule, but in many, even fundamental articles, flatly contradict it: but if the Bible be indeed out of the question, in these matters; Seceders may have some plea for their political principles. If conditions of vesting with civil authority, as well as all other things in general, be either right or wrong, in themselves, and as determined by the Divine Law, independent of men's choice; Dissenters may be justified, in carefully inquiring into the fundamental conditions of rule, in the nation where they are, comparing these with Scripture, and former good attainments, and either approving, or rejecting, as they find them to agree, or disagree; yea, so long as they demean themselves peaceably and inoffensively, no man can, consistently, blame them, for refusing to recognize such authorities, as have no existence, but upon anti-scriptural conditions of advancement: whereas, if there be no saying what is right, or what is wrong, on that

that head, what is, or what is not indispensibly necessary to constitute lawful authority, in any given circumstances, until the majority of the nation declare their will; then Seceders may find it less difficult to support their doctrine. If much shall certainly be required of those, to whom much is given, and if they who have sinned under the law, must be judged by the law; it will be hard to prove that Dissenters are wrong, in asserting, that the case of the Heathen, who sit in darkness, is not parallel to the case of Christians, who enjoy the clear sunshine of Divine Revelation, and that, therefore, there can be no conclusive reasoning, from the one to the other, even with respect to the essentials of lawful civil authority: but if the case be truly parallel, and the very same things sufficient to constitute lawful authority, in the one case, and in the other; then Seceders may have much to say, in their own behalf. If society should be formed by mutual consent; where is the absurdity of teaching, as Dissenters do, that even the minority have a right to be honest recusants, when they find the fundamental laws of the new society, and the fixed conditions of bearing office in it, contrary to Scripture, and to the solemnly-ratified rules of the former society, unto which they gave their hearty concurrence: but if rational consent be unnecessary, and the minority should always be obliged to yield, whether they can in judgment approve or not; then Seceders may well blame us, for refusing to say, A confederacy, with the rest of the nation. If we relinquish former laudable and solemnly-ratified, attainments, at our peril, and if those, who afterwards consent, be guilty, as well as the first transgressors; why are Dissenters condemned, for endeavouring, whereunto the nation hath already attained, in the state as well as in the church, and whereunto all ranks have sworn adherence, to walk by the same rule, and to mind the same things? But if these attainments may be openly disregarded, and yet the nation be at least so far blameless, that we may safely acquiesce in these very same public deeds of investiture which involve, yea openly proclaim, the apostacy; then we

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need not be surprized, though our principles, on civil government, be every-where spoken against, and though our Seceding Brethren be also loud in the cry. Once more, if passive obedience, or bearing the common public burdens of a nation, while no question is asked for conscience' sake, and while nothing, positively sinful in itself, is required, be quite another thing, than free voluntary obedience, arising from a properly constituted moral relation, between the superior and inferior, and if this passive obedience ascertain nothing, with respect to either the legality, or illegality, of the ruler's authority; Dissenters need not be so much reproached, for supposed inconsistency, between their profession, and their general, openly allowed practice, for as to the disallowed practice of the individual, it is out of the question, on both sides: but if there be indeed no specific difference between the subjection which may and must be yielded, in a case of constraint, when those who are permitted to rule over a people, because of their sins, have dominion over their bodies, and over their cattle at their pleasure, and they are in great distress, and that subjection which ought to be freely yielded unto the Scriptural authority which we can, in judgment and conscience, approve; then Seceders are in the right, when they draw their arguments, for voluntary and conscientious obedience unto lawful authority, from cases of passive obedience and non-resistance. It is hoped, then, the intelligent reader will easily perceive, that the dispute, between Seceders and Dissenters, turns properly upon the truth, or falsehood, of the general propositions, exhibited in the Introduction. If these be admitted, as uncontroverted truths; every sentiment, maintained by the Reformed Presbytery, on the head of civil government, will follow, as a just and necessary consequence: whereas, if these can be proved to be false; Secession principles, on that head, may be the more readily vindicated.

Let us not, therefore, be any longer abused, by laying things to our charge, which we know not, and of which we never entertained the most distant thought. The

question is not about the standing force of the many Scripture-precepts, injoining obedience to the higher powers. The binding obligation of these, in all periods of the church, is freely granted, and strenuously contended for, on both sides: the difficulty lies, in the practical application of them, to the proper object. Neither is there any controversy, concerning the evil and danger of rebellion, against lawful authority: this evil was never, in the least, extenuated by Dissenters, more than by Seceders. Nor, if we would deal candidly by each other, have we any dispute, with regard to the examples of the saints, either those recorded in the Scripture, or these of the martyrs, in later times; as though we did not agree, whether they be a rule unto us, or not. If they correspond with the precept, they are set for our imitation: if they do not, their motto is, Beware of splitting on the same rock. This doctrine, I hope, is firmly believed, and uniformly taught, by both parties. But if once certain specified examples, like these of the martyrs in the late persecution, be openly approved, on all hands, it may indeed be a question, To which principles do they shew the most favourable aspect? It is also foreign unto our present contest, to inquire, what may, or what should be done by Heathens; who, not having the Scripture-law, are a law unto themselves? But let us be told, what should be done by us Christians, amidst all our superior advantages? Neither doth it any more properly concern this controversy, to shew, what sort of government might have been born with, in a less perfect, and less enlightened state of the nation: but, what is requisite now? Nor, lastly, is the inquiry about the propriety of demeaning ourselves, peaceably and inoffensively, groaning beneath oppressive burdens, which we cannot avoid; so long as no ensnaring question is put home to the conscience, and while we have it not in our power to make matters better. This Dissenters have uniformly endeavoured to do, since ever they were a people. At no time, have they ever entertained the remotest thought, of offering outward violence to any man,

man, let his sentiments differ from their's, as much as they may. The weapons of their warfare are not carnal. But they wish to inquire, concerning such subjection, and such alone, as properly recognizes the title of rulers, holding, and exercising their authority, upon sinful conditions.

Let the dispute, then, be fairly stated. We have long enjoyed the Bible, as the complete rule of our faith and practice, in every department of life. We have reached high attainments, in state-reformation. These attainments have been incorporated into the fundamental laws of the kingdom. All ranks, in general, have solemnly sworn adherence unto them. Dissenters still feel, on their own conscience, the weight of that obligation. After mature deliberation, and diligently using every mean, in their power; they have no clearness to relinquish the former laudable, and fundamental conditions of bearing rule, in the kingdom of Scotland. The question, therefore, is precisely this, Whether, in such circumstances, it be really their duty, and they should still be obliged, to acquiesce in the public deeds of the nation; while forming a new society; advancing their rulers, on conditions, not only opposite unto, but destructive of the former; and while manifesting their loyalty, by such actions, as necessarily involve an approbation of the constitution, and recognize the justness of the ruler's title? Or, whether they should not rather be allowed to dissent, and manage their Testimony, under a public protestation, against these deeds; as they have actually done, first in the persons of their forefathers, and now in their own persons; especially so long as they still endeavour, notwithstanding their dissent, to live peaceably with all men, whether high or low, rich or poor?

If Mr. Fletcher chuse to meet us, on this ground; he may expect to be waited upon. But if he, or his brethren, mean to agitate questions, on other subjects, concerning which there is, evidently, no dispute between us; it is hoped, that they will be kind enough, to excuse some of us, at least, from seeing them again, in the field of this disagreeable contest.

Seemingly resolved to make the poor Dissenters appear as obnoxious as may be, Mr. Fletcher tells them, "A saying common with you, from press and pulpit, is, That the British magistrates are unlawful magistrates, and therefore all their commands are unlawful." † As our opponent hath not condescended to mention either book, or page of the book, where this proposition is to be found; and as I do not remember ever to have met with it, in this form, either from pulpit, or press; it deserves no other attention, than what is due to all such manufactured doctrines. We have never made any objections to the government, without, at the same time, assigning our reasons. If Mr. Fletcher chuse to combat these, and think, that he can overturn them; we are willing to listen unto him,



ANIMADVERSIONS ON SECTION II.

IN this section, the chief complaint upon the Letter, from Crookedholm, is, that it brings a false, and unproved charge, against the Loyalist; while it makes him to argue for passive obedience and non-resistance. "A quotation from the Loyalist," it is said, "in which the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance is asserted, or necessarily implied, would have done honour to Mr. Steven's understanding and honesty." ‡ While it is supposed, that the Loyalist teaches the very opposite doctrine.

As Mr. Fletcher positively declares, that he is no advocate for the slavish doctrine of passive obedience; it is but reasonable to give him credit for the assertion; and I should certainly be very sorry to contradict him. At the same time, that the pamphlet, entitled "The Scripture Loyalist," produceth, generally, in support of the doctrine which it teaches, only such arguments, as serve to plead the cause of passive obedience and non-resistance,

† Def. p. 9.

‡ p. 11.

ance, is clear as noon-day. The two great sources of argument, indeed, are said to be Scripture-precepts, and, Scripture-examples. Both which, as rightly understood, and properly, applied, will be readily acknowledged on all hands. But in applying general rules, the various circumstances, of given cases, should surely be considered. Had the Loyalist first carefully considered the precious attainments of the nation, where the power exists; described the qualities of the power itself, by shewing it to be properly constituted moral authority; proved the conditions, on which it is given and received, to be such as are warranted, by the unerring standard; plainly pointed out the many good and important ends, for the accomplishment of which it is exercised; and then told us, that, having ascertained all these, the general rules must now be applied; we should have frankly granted, that he was speaking to the purpose. But if no other reason be assigned, for the application of the precepts, to the case in hand, than the bare existence of the power, the chiming over these words, "The powers that be;" the sum of such doctrine is neither more nor less, than this, "Be king who may; we must be subjects." The divine precepts are thus viewed and applied, in such a loose manner, as makes them equally ready for the service of the absolute tyrant, and of the lawful magistrate. And what cause that is calculated to plead, the impartial reader shall be left to judge.

As to the instances given, and the examples aduced, by the Loyalist, † they are, unquestionably, on the side of the servile doctrine. They exhibit cases of the most pitiable, and abject slavery. They present to our view the people of God, as taught, indeed, to bear the oppressive burdens, which were laid upon them. Taught, not by a conscience of duty, to lawful magistrates, who had a moral right to rule over them; but taught, by the stern law of necessity, and the mere dint of superior power; from which they found it impracticable for them, to extricate themselves.

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Was it not, with a witness, passive subjection, of this kind, which the sons of Jacob yielded to the haughty Egyptian monarchs, for several generations? The Lord himself characterizes the powers, under whom they should groan. Says he to Abram, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years." * The history verified the prediction. "The Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour.—They made their lives bitter with hard bondage.—All their service wherewith they made them serve, was with rigour.—Pharaoh charged all the people, saying, Every son that is born, ye shall cast into the river." † The Righteous Judge of heaven and earth himself evidently considers Pharaoh as a very terrible scourge, in the chastising hand of over-ruling providence. He views his chosen people, as subjected to a very sore punishment, while under his arbitrary sway; and therefore, he addresses to Moses this language of compassion, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, by reason of their task-masters: for I know their sorrows.—Behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them." ‡

Of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonish Monarch, who carried the Lord's people captive, this is the description,—“All people, nations and languages trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive, and whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down.” † In full consistency with this absolute despotism, we find him commanding to destroy all the wise men of Babylon; merely because they could not tell, what it was simply impossible for any mortal to tell, without some extraordinary revelation from heaven. § And, on another occasion, causing public proclamation to be made to people, nations,

* Gen. xv. 13. † Exod. i. 13, 14. 22. ‡ Chap. iii. 7. 9.

‡ Dan. v. 19. § Dan. ii. 12.

tions, and languages, that they should fall down and worship the golden image which he had set up; and that whosoever would not fall down and worship, should the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. * Both sacred and human history warrant us to say, that his successors trode in much the same path. The sons of Jacob certainly best knew their own real situation, under the foreign kings, who swayed an arbitrary sceptre over them; and who were the rod of God's anger, and the staff of his indignation, for their punishment. But, while they sat weeping by the rivers of Babylon, their language, expressive of their enslaved condition, was, "They that carried us away captive, required of us a song; and they that *wasted* us required of us mirth." † And, even in their, comparatively, better situation, under the Persian Monarchs they still find themselves obliged to say, "The kings, whom thou hast set over us, because of our sins,—have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress." ‡

As to Nero, under whose tyrannical government many of the primitive Christians lived, and during whose reign the Epistle to the Romans appears to have been written, the following account of him is given by an author, whose testimony Mr. Fletcher cannot well refuse: "In the first part of his reign," says he, "he behaved with some decency and justice. In the end of it, he turned one of the most tyrannical wretches that ever breathed. He murdered his mother, and almost all his friends and principal subjects.—He caused burn the city of Rome, and sung one of his poems at the view of the flames.—He transferred the blame on the innocent Christians. Multitudes of them were apprehended; some were sewed up in the skins of wild beasts, and torn to pieces by dogs; others were crucified; others were burnt in Nero's gardens, as nocturnal illuminations to the city, while he, with great pleasure, beheld the spectacle from the window." † Another account says, "The

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* Dan. iii 4, 5, 6. † Psal. cxxxvii. 3. ‡ Neh. ix. 37.

† Brown's Dict. of Bib. on the word NERO.

first who raised a general persecution against the Christians was the Emperor Nero, of whom Turtullian tells the Gentiles; and, for the confirmation thereof, appeals to their public records; *We glory, says he, in such an author of our persecution: any body who knows him, may understand, that nothing but what is eminently good could be condemned by Nero.* He was a prince of such brutish and extravagant manners, as their own writers scruple not to call him a beast in human shape, the very monster of mankind." † A modern Author, speaking of him, and some other Roman Emperors, thus asks, and replies, "What was Nero, what Caligula? One a bloody idiot, the other an inhuman madman; the first like the second, and both of them public robbers and butchers. If their course of cruelties and oppression was government, so are plagues, tempests and inundations: but if their lives and actions were altogether pernicious and detestable; the exterminating of such monsters from amongst men, would have been a service to the whole race. Was Tarquin half so black and odious? Yet who has ever blamed his expulsion? Was the insolence and tyranny of Tarquin the ordinance of God? — What more right had Nero to take away the lives of innocent men than any other assassin; what more title to their fortune than any other robber; what better right to spill their blood than any tyger? And is it unlawful to resist robbers, and assassins, and beasts of prey? Did the Almighty ever say of that beastly tyrant, Touch not Nero my anointed, nor do his ruffians any harm? Did Nero's station lessen or abrogate his crimes?"

"What idea does it give of God, the Father of mercies and of men, to represent him screening that enemy to God and man, as a person sacred and inviolable; and holding his authority from himself; the merciful and holy JEHOVAH protecting an inhuman destroyer! What more relation could there be between God and Nero than between God and an earthquake, God and a conflagration or massacre? The very sound of the
phrase

† Gillies' Histor. Collect. Vol. 1. p. 7.

phrase is shocking to the soul! Is such representation likely to make the name and nature of God amiable to men, likely to excite them to love and reverence him? Satan is said to be delighted with the miseries and calamities of men; and to suppose that wicked being concerned for the security of a tyrant, whose office it is to debase and afflict the human race, is natural and consistent with his character: but I wish men would not father upon the Author of all good such counsels and inclinations, as can only suit the father of cruelties and lies." † These sentiments, perfectly congenial with my own, I am happy to find expressed, to much better purpose, by this masterly Writer, than they could have been by me. Mr. Fletcher will not, surely, reckon him a Doctor of our dubbing. He is an approver of the British Constitution, and dedicates his Book to Sir Robert Walpole, the, then, British Minister; an evidence, that he was pretty high in favour. But when the mind is not warped by prejudice; the force of truth will often appear, where we would not so readily expect it.

With regard to the example of our Saviour, in suffering himself to be persecuted, and shamefully abused, by the rulers of his time; it is, to the last degree, astonishing, that ever any writer should think of drawing an argument from that, to prove the propriety of yielding conscientious obedience, to the powers that be; and yet deny, that he pleads the cause of slavery! Did Jesus submit himself to Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the rulers of the Jews, in virtue of any duty, which he owed unto them, as the ministers of God, who are a terror to evil doers, and the praise of them that do well? No, indeed; but it was their hour and the power of darkness, and the authority which they exercised over him, was wholly usurped, tyrannical, and unjust. In his submission to them, he was placed in a situation, in which none other ever was, nor ever will be. As the Surety of his people, he endured all the mal-treatment, and agonizing
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† Gordon's Discourses on Tacitus, prefixed to his Translation of that Author. Dis. 5. Sect. 2. p. 53, 55. Fol. Edit.

sufferings, which they deserved, on account of sin. These sufferings had been typified and foretold, in the Scriptures of truth. Yea, it had pleased the Lord, that the Saviour should be bruised, and put to grief. The designs of Heaven must, therefore, be accomplished. It behoved him to suffer these things; and enter into his glory. From such considerations it was, that he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them, who plucked off the hair, and hid not his face from shame and spitting. But instead of requiring his people, voluntarily, to subject themselves unto such treatment, and, in such respects, to be the servants of rulers; he graciously allows them to pray, "Deliver me, O God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man." † We shall likely be told, "This is not the subjection intended by Christ's becoming a servant of rulers: it refers to his exemplary conduct, in paying the tribute-money at Capernaum, and his teaching to render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's; whereby he shewed the propriety of obeying the powers that were." ‡ With respect to the tribute demanded at Capernaum, it is generally thought, that it was sacred tribute, given for the service of the sanctuary. But whatever may be properly meant by it; this much is certain, from our Lord's reply to Peter, that he considered himself, as under no obligation to pay it; though he did not chuse to quarrel with them, on that subject. As to his teaching, to give Cesar his due, even supposing, for a moment, the text should be understood as Mr. Fletcher would have it; yet to teach others to be servants of rulers, is one thing; and to become himself a servant of rulers, is another; so that it can never possibly be proved, from this text, in what respect our Saviour was a servant of rulers. Besides, the pious Mr. Henry, who is cited, with approbation, by Mr. Fletcher, tells us, concerning Christ's subjection, "This he submitted to, for our salvation." It is hoped our friend himself will allow, that neither the paying
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† Psal. lxxi. 4. ‡ Mat. xvii. 24,—27. & xxii. 21. See Loy. p. 21.

of the tribute at Capernaum, nor the teaching to give Cesar his due, can, strictly speaking, be considered, as the procuring causes of our salvation, or as that, which, under the notion of a punishment, the Surety behoved to submit unto, in his accomplishing the work of our redemption. His agonizing and ignominious sufferings, when pouring out his soul unto death, must ever be intended, when we speak of the chastisement of our peace being upon him. And, in these sufferings, he might be viewed as a servant of rulers indeed; *i. e.* treated by them like a slave: inasmuch as the Heathen and Jewish rulers, of that time, had the chief hand in conducting the bloody tragedy, and were the wicked, though over-ruled, instruments of his death; † even the death of the cross; which was reserved for the slaves, or bond-servants of Rome.

The attentive reader will easily discern the propriety of taking into consideration the above instances of subjection to the several powers, which have been described. They are all produced, and strongly urged by Mr. Fletcher as so many precedents, for our imitation, in owning the authority, and yielding conscientious obedience unto the lawful commands, of the powers that be. ‡ For if he mean not such objection, as properly recognizes the justness of the ruler's title; he speaks not a word to the dispute, between him and us. But as we have found all the above to be cases of the most pitiable and abject slavery; the Loyalist's adducing, and keenly urging them, in support of his doctrine, plainly proves him to be in the "hostile camp of absolute power," whether he ever really intended it, or not. But if it shall still be contended, that the above are not properly instances of passive obedience and non-resistance, taught, not by a conscience of duty to lawful moral authority, but by the stern law of necessity; might I be permitted to ask, what these terms mean, or whether they have any meaning at all? For my own part, I freely confess, that after striking the above from the list, I should be altogether
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† Acts iv. 26, 27.

‡ Loy. 18,—21.

at a loss to find a single instance of slavery, in the whole annals of history, either sacred, or profane. There is not therefore, I apprehend, the least room for insinuating, that Mr. Steven could not produce a quotation from the Loyalist, to substantiate the charge, of his pleading the cause of slavery. Mr. Steven hath very fully reasoned the matter; and made it abundantly evident, that the general scope, spirit and tendency of the Loyalist's argumentation, necessarily lead us into the hostile camp of absolute power. Yea, he hath cited several passages, in so many words, largely animadverted upon them, and shewn that they fix the charge: as every impartial reader, who hath paid proper attention to his Letter, must, at once, see. †

I would charitably hope, that Mr. Fletcher's real sentiments are in opposition to the obsolete doctrine of passive obedience; and that it is only in the unguarded hour of warm dispute, and flaming zeal against Dissenters, that he says any thing to the contrary. But pray, for what reason is it, that he deliberately produceth the above instances of slavery in support of his cause? He will tell us,—“The more despotic the Roman Cæsars,” and the other powers above mentioned, “were, the stronger is the argument for subjection to the present British Magistrates.—If the Holy Ghost commanded the Christians at Rome to be subject to Heathen Magistrates, ought not we to be subject to Magistrates who are professed, and no doubt many of them true Christians?” ‡ But not so very fast, dear Sir, if you please. The conclusion will only hold, upon the supposition, that you still intend the very same kind of subjection. † If the argument stand thus, Seeing it was the duty of the Lord's people, in the above cases, and while they could not possibly make it better, to yield passive obedience unto those powers, who, for holy and wise purposes, were then permitted to tyrannize over them; much more is it our duty
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† See Mr. Steven's Anf. to Query 5. Let. p. 80,—88. also p. 103, &c.

‡ Def. p. 28.

† See Prop. 7. in our Introduction.

now, while matters continue as they are, to yield passive obedience to the milder British rulers; I know no ingenuous Dissenter, who will not readily say, Amen. We certainly reckon it our duty to live peaceably and inoffensively; to submit to such things as are, in their own nature, lawful or innocent; and even, with as much patience as possible, to bear the oppressive burdens which may be laid upon us, while we cannot help it, and while these things are not required as tesseras of our loyalty, nor any ensnaring questions put home to the conscience; which is what I would understand by passive obedience, in cases of necessity. But let the argument be stated thus, as indeed it is virtually done, in both the Loyalist and Defence: Because the Lord's people, in the above cases, yielded, as they necessarily behoved to do, passive obedience unto the powers, under which they then were; therefore it is our duty, to own the authority of the present British Magistrates, as lawfully constituted authority; to which we owe allegiance and subjection, for conscience' sake; it is apprehended, that then Mr. Fletcher's reasoning is by no means conclusive. Any person acquainted with the very first rudiments of Logic, will easily discern the defect; and see, that, in the progress of the argument, there is a sudden, and unexpected transition, from one sort of subjection, unto another specifically different. Should our opponent complain, that we have here introduced a new term; he speaks nothing about allegiance to the present government, when he pleads that we should own its authority and obey its lawful commands; I would beg leave to reply, that to speak about owning authority, as lawful, and voluntarily obeying a power, as ordained of God, "loyalty to which is clearly taught in the Scriptures of truth, and rebellion against which is as the sin of witchcraft;" and yet refuse that we owe, and ought to swear allegiance unto it, will be found, I presume, a much more glaring inconsistency, than any, which have yet appeared, between the generally allowed practice of Dissenters, and the principles, which they maintain.

The quotations from the Loyalist, as we find them towards the end of this Section, † in order to shew that he never was in the “hostile camp of absolute power,” only serve, after what hath just been proved upon him, to confirm more strongly Mr. Steven’s observation, “that he is like the watermen, who set their face one way, and row another.” ‡

Mr. Fletcher is glad to find Mr. Steven adopt, and express in stronger terms than even he himself hath used, the doctrine of the Loyalist, with respect to obedience, or subjection, in things lawful, to those of a different religion, or even to tyrants. † If his joy be sincere; why should it not be indulged? Peaceable submission, in cases of necessity, to things lawful in their nature, even under the greatest tyrants and usurpers, is a matter concerning which, so far as I know at least, there never was any dispute, between Seceders and Dissenters. But subjection of this kind, is one thing; and owning lawful authority, is another. There is not, therefore, the smallest ground for that challenge, with which the Section concludes, “How comes it to pass, that the very same doctrine,” taught in the Letter, when “taught by the Loyalist, is injurious to truth, and to the civil and religious privileges of men?” It has this tendency, Sir, only when you introduce it to prove, that every government, under which such subjection is, or ought to be, yielded, must, consequently, be considered and owned as a lawfully constituted government; or, in other words, the moral ordinance of God, appointed for his glory, and the happiness of human society, and which is clearly entitled to our voluntary obedience, for conscience’ sake. If you only contend for the subjection itself, as expressive of the Christian’s peaceable and inoffensive deportment, under any government, and at the same time grant, that this kind of subjection doth not at all affect the question, about properly owning the authority, or recognizing the just title of those, to whom it is yielded; we have no dispute, on that head. You may

† Def. p. 12, -- 14. ‡ Let. p. 110. † See Def. p. 13, 14.

may safely, without running any hazard of being contradicted by us, express such subjection, in terms as strong as those in the Letter, or even stronger, if you please. But the attentive reader cannot fail to discern, and Mr. Fletcher himself knows, perfectly well, that while Mr. Steven is speaking of this subjection, in strong terms, he, all along, positively refuses, and shews how it cannot be, that it hath any connection with owning the government, under which it is yielded. or that it can ever be considered as any proof, that the authority, requiring it, is lawful.



ANIMADVERSIONS ON SECTION III.

SCRIPTURE precepts and examples; the conduct of the martyrs, under the late persecution; and the duty of praying for wicked rulers, are the principal objects of attention, in this Section.

Concerning the precepts and examples, it is hoped, that the reader will remember what hath already been said. † From them all, in general, Mr. Fletcher thus infers, If it was the duty of the saints to be subject, in such and such cases, then; much more is it our duty, now, when matters are comparatively on a better footing. Agreeably to what was said above, the force of the reasoning is easily admitted, and militates nothing against Dissenting principles; providing that only the same kind of subjection be required now. But the question is, Did the subjection that was either enjoined, or actually yielded, even then, properly imply a recognizing of the ruler's title? Did it necessarily involve an approbation of the conditions, upon which he occupied the throne, and swayed the sceptre? An idea altogether inseparable from the owning of any authority, in the strict and proper sense of the term. Did it, in all
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† See the foregoing p. 40,—47.

the cases, comprehend solemn allegiance to the existing power, as the lawful authority, appointed by God, for his own glory, and the good of human society? Would it have been warrantable for the Lord's people, possessing their own land; having the benefit of Divine Revelation; already brought forward to very high attainments, in state-reformation; engaged, by public vows and former fundamental laws of the kingdom, to preserve these attainments; and now acting voluntarily, in their national capacity, all which were in the case, at the Revolution, 1688; would it, I say, have been warrantable, in these circumstances, to have chosen, for their rulers, such persons as the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian monarchs, or the Heathen Roman Emperors, especially such as Nero? "No such thing," Mr. Fletcher will reply, "was ever either said, or intended." If so; then the producing of these instances, to ascertain the lawfulness of the authority, in our times, and circumstances, and to enforce obedience, and allegiance unto it, as such, must be entirely foreign to the subject. Our opponent will probably grant, as his brethren have done, before, that the representatives of the nation, at the Revolution, in relinquishing the reformation-attainments, and in adopting quite new and opposite conditions of advancement, to places of power and trust, acted very far wrong, † "but now the powers that be, are actually raised to their places, by the body politic, or majority of the nation, they rule by the consent of the far greater part of the subjects; you are but a very small and inconsiderable minority; you ought, therefore, to live peaceably, and submit to every thing which is innocent and lawful." So say Dissenters also; and their avowed principles never led them to think, nor to say otherwise. But, meanwhile, they are not fond of being forced, to approve fundamental laws, and conditions of government; which, after all the means of information they can use, still appear to them, diametrically opposite, both to Scripture,

and

† Declar. & Def. of Prin. p. 50, 51.

and reformation-attainments; nor do they wish to do any such things, as necessarily imply that approbation: which is what they properly mean by disowning the government; and not personal hatred of the existing rulers; disturbing human society; propagating their principles, by open force; or joining, in the wicked counsels, and inconsistent measures, of such as may be disposed to raise seditious tumults, and appear in open rebellion against those, who, for the present, fill the places of power and trust; for these are things to which they have ever shewn a just and strong aversion.

As to the litigated passages of Scripture, which are again brought under review, in this Section; it would be quite idle, to travel the same ground, over and over. If the candid inquirer can shew the mistake, I shall be happy to receive his information, and to stand corrected by him; but to me it appears, that the amount of what Mr. Fletcher hath here said upon them, is plainly this, "After all, which the Loyalist can find, in the Letter from Crookedholm, he still retains his former sentiments, with little or no variation; and, if the reader chuse to let him speak for himself, it will be seen that he hath expounded these passages right." Accordingly, quotations are often given; and he is frequently called forward, to speak in his own behalf. Much of this trouble, I should think, might have been saved, by simply desiring the reader, carefully to look over the Loyalist again. In like manner, it might, at present, suffice, in reply, after what hath been already said, to desire the same reader, carefully to look over the interpretations given by the Reformed Presbytery, in their Testimony, and by Mess. M^cMillan and Steven, in their respective Letters; and then judge betwixt them, as he may find cause. A number of human authorities, indeed, are likewise mentioned by Mr. Fletcher; but this was also done by Mr. Steven, on his side of the question. And to these we might now add a small pamphlet, entitled, "Sacred Politics." The Author of it, whoever he is, cannot surely be suspected of being a Scotch Dissenter. It would rather appear, from his Preface, that he knows

nothing of their existence, or at least of their principles; and yet he explains the litigated passages nearly, if not exactly, in the same manner, in which they do:

But even supposing we should grant Mr. Fletcher the benefit of all his expositors, on these texts; he will perhaps, find it very difficult to prove, that the subjection, for which they plead, implies any thing more than that passive obedience, which may and must be yielded, under any existing government, having full power over a people, because of their sins. In the quotation from Pool are these words, “—Although Cesar be an usurper, yet God hath given you into his hands, you have owned him, by accepting his coin as current among you.” * Pray, what other sort of owning, or subjection, than that just mentioned, could it consistently be; or what more could even their paying of the tribute, supposing they were actually to do it, necessarily imply? Was it their duty, formally and explicitly to recognize the title of an usurper? Certainly not: nor is it possible to believe, that our Saviour would ever have required of them any such thing; as Mr. Steven has indeed clearly proved, by many strong and conclusive arguments †; which, very wisely for his own cause, Mr. Fletcher hath been pleased entirely to overlook. In the quotation from Henry, it is said, “—Some think, the superscription upon this coin, was a memorandum of the conquest of Judea by the Romans, *Anno post captam Judeam*; and they admitted this too.” ‡ Does Mr. Fletcher, aided, as he supposes, by the pious Mr. Henry, mean to teach, that conquest furnishes out a just title to regal authority over a people? If he do; in vain shall he ever afterwards refuse, that he pleads the cause of slavery. It will be no salvo to say, that their consent to wear his yoke, legitimated his authority; for they were expressly bound, by the law of their God, to chuse one of a very different description; it could not, then, consistently at least, be a matter of voluntary choice, but of necessity. They might find themselves obliged to submit unto
Cesar’s

* Def. p. 15. † See Let. p. 89,—107. ‡ Def. p. 16:

Cesar's yoke, as a just punishment for their sins, and even supposing God had required them patiently to bear it, yet could they never be called to consider it as a public good, or as a proper object of moral choice: a light, in which every lawful authority ought certainly to be viewed. If Mr. Fletcher should grant, that the lawfulness of the authority in question is not asserted in these texts, nor has it any necessary connection with them, † I beg leave to reply, that no other sort of subjection, supposed to be enforced by them, can in the least militate against the declared principles of Dissenters.

Mr. Fletcher maintains, that the sense which the Reformed Brethren have given of Matth. xxii. 21. is three-fold, and full of manifest contradictions. "—The first," says he, "represents Christ as teaching, That tribute was neither due nor undue to Cesar. The second represents him as teaching, That death was due to Cesar. And the third represents him as forbidding to give tribute to Cesar." ‡ I am truly sorry that such childish banter, for even charity forbids to give it another name, should ever have dropt from the pen of one, claiming the honourable appellation of a gospel-minister. Because the Reformed Brethren, as he is pleased to call them, may find occasion to make three, or, it may be, six, or even supposing it were ten, distinct observations, in order to ascertain the true meaning of a passage of Scripture; does that say, that they impose so many different and contradictory senses upon it? If Mr. Fletcher were not determined, wilfully to pervert the language, and to disregard the scope and connection of the explanation, given by his opponents; he would find it to be as much one, as that for which he contends. It is simply this, That, for holy and wise reasons, which they particularly notice, our Saviour declined, as he did in several other cases, to give any direct answer at all, unto the captious question that was put, to ensnare him. Whether Cesar's claim to the tribute-money was just,

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† See Def. p. 82, 83. ‡ p. 16, 17.

or unjust, he did not chuse to say. But because we find him, in another case, declining to comply with the request of the man, who asked him, to speak unto his brother, that he might divide the inheritance with him;* does that say, he taught him, that the inheritance was neither to be divided, nor left undivided? Because he declined directly to answer the question, concerning the woman taken in adultery; and, finding that none of her accusers had condemned her, said, "Neither do I condemn thee;" † does that say, he taught, that she was neither to be condemned, nor uncondemned; neither put to death, nor suffered to live? No such thing. Neither can Mr. Fletcher's allegation, concerning the Reformed Presbytery's interpretation of Mat. xxii. 21. be more consistently admitted.

Though obliged himself sometimes to defend his doctrine by very abstract reasoning, as Mr. Steven has clearly proved against him; ‡ yet our friend Mr. Fletcher, hath a mighty struggle, for ten or eleven pages together, with those harmless antagonists, "Magistracy in the abstract," and "A practical submission to God's ordinance, even while it is not vested in the person of any human administrator." † Seemingly resolved to fight neither with small nor great, but with these terms; he chimes them over, one or other of them, twenty or thirty different times, in this Section. Had Mr. Steven been properly aware, that he had to do with an opponent, who was determined to disregard his scope, run away with detached expressions, and torture every unguarded word, in the most unmerciful manner; he might probably have seen, that the term, "practical submission," in the case before us, was not the most happily chosen. He does not indeed appear to have been taken altogether at unawares; for, in his Letter, he grants, that he may very readily "be corrected in words improperly chosen,—and thoughts improperly expressed;" and expects, that "Occasion may likewise be taken,

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* Luke xii. 13, 14 † John viii. 3,—11. ‡ Let. p. 45.

‡ Def. p. 18,—25.

to dress up these in some hideous form, and then combat the man of straw with great pomp." † How exactly is the expectation realized, in this Section of the Defence! To every candid, and unprejudiced reader, however, Mr. Steven's meaning is perfectly obvious. It is evidently this, that Christians may not only, in their judgment and conscience, heartily approve of civil rule, and proper subordination, amongst mankind; but, in their daily practice, and in all their civil transactions, may actually demean themselves, in an orderly, decent and becoming manner, according to the true spirit and design of every well regulated magistracy; even where, for the time being, there is no formally organized legislature, or any civil magistrates, as yet, actually installed into the office. Without granting this, it will be very difficult to see, what either is, or can be done, in cases of important, necessary, and, if you will, glorious revolutions; when the throne is abdicated, or vacated, by some means or other; when there is a total interregnum; and, for the time being, not so much as a regency. At such times, it is allowed, great disorders have often happened. But it would bear very hard upon the characters of our fellow-men to say, that even in such cases, none could be found, who manifested, even by their practice, a proper regard to civil order, or good government, amongst mankind.

But after all, I humbly apprehend, that Mr. Fletcher should shew a little more lenity to magistracy, even abstractly considered: that mode of expression hath certainly been used, in treating various other subjects; by men, as famous in their generation, and of as distinguished abilities, I suppose, as any amongst either Seceders or Dissenters; while they do not appear to have been blamed, by the best linguists, or the severest critics of their time. And what, if Mr. Fletcher himself should still need the aid of that very idea, which he so exceedingly reprobates. He allows, that the passage, Rom. xiii. 1.—7. "—Contains an exhortation to be subject to civil rulers,

† Let. p. 129.

rulers, with motives to enforce the exhortation." * The motives must certainly be such as these, "their being the ministers of God for good, a terror to evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well." For he also allows, that "Rulers in the third verse, and God's Ministers in the sixth, are an explication of powers in the first verse." † Consequently, it is still the same power, to which we are required to be subject, on pain of condemnation; and which is particularly described, in the same passage. But after you have stript Nero, the Roman Emperor, of all the amiable characters here given; and, if the above account of him ‡ be just, as I believe it is, he certainly, especially towards the end of his reign, did not actually possess so much as one of them; you will have, if not magistracy in the abstract, at least as abstract a sort of magistrate, as imagination itself can form. He must be considered, merely, formally, and abstractly, as a magistrate; without any regard to the lawfulness of his title, his real character, his actual administration of the government, or the ends for which he swayed the sceptre. So far was he from being a terror to evil-doers; that he was himself the very head and chief of them. And, instead of being a praise to them who did well; he was the violent persecutor, yea, and bloody murderer, of such as did well, in respect of both civil, and religious well-doing. † Yet to this very abstract magistrate indeed, or, which amounts to the same thing, to this Emperor, simply considered as a magistrate, without regarding either the nature, the rule, or the reason of his actual government, the primitive Christians, it seems, could, consistently enough, yield practical submission.

"If this abstract sense," says Mr. Fletcher, viz, that against which he contends, "be true, it must be invariable; for the meaning of Scripture doth not change with the times." § To this we add our hearty Amen; and it makes much for our purpose. The abstract sense

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* Def. p. 19. † p. 24. ‡ See before p. 43, 44, 45.

† See the Annals of Tacitus, their own Historian. § Def. p. 19.

is certainly invariable, namely, That civil magistracy is a precious ordinance, appointed by God, for his own glory and the good of human society. This is a truth clearly taught, by the Holy Spirit, in the passage before us: and it is a truth, which will remain invariable, to the end of the world. It is no less invariably true, that when and wheresoever, we can find civil powers, clothed with the amiable characters; and, by their government, answering the important purposes, particularly specified in the passage, they ought to be considered as the powers ordained of God; to whom we owe subjection, for conscience' sake. There is no lawful authority, as the original word properly signifies, or moral power of this kind, at any time, or in any part of the world, but it is of God, as the great fountain from which it proceeds. All the powers, of this description, which are to be found amongst men, in whatever period of time, and in whatever place, are to be owned, and subjected unto, as expressly appointed of God; for the promoting of his own glory, and the happiness of mankind. These we consider as unchangeable truths; evidently taught, in this passage of Scripture.

And, by the by, it is humbly submitted, to the judicious and candid reader, whether there be any violence done to that mode of expression, "the powers THAT BE," by giving this turn to the passage; or whether it be not even more natural, simple, and easy, than the cramped interpretation, which confines it to the powers, then existing at Rome; as though the words had run in this manner, "The powers which, at the present moment, actually exist in Rome, are ordained of God."—Mr. Fletcher himself, it is hoped, will allow, that these two expressions, "There is no power," and, "The powers that be," are equally extensive, in their meaning and application. "Every school-boy can tell, that the words," in both cases equally, "are in the present time." But when it is said, "There *is* no power," whether is this the meaning, There is no power, at present existing in Rome; or is it rather, There is no lawful power or authority, neither at one time nor another,

ther, nor in any place whatsoever, but it should be considered as of God? And if this sense shall be admitted here; by what rule of interpretation is it, that the other phrase, "The powers that be," should be understood in a more limited sense? Is it not still the same subject, which is said to be "OF GOD," and "ORDAINED OF GOD?" When our Saviour says, "There *is* no man, that hath left house, or brethren, &c. —but he shall receive an hundred fold—"; † we all know that the word is in the present time; and yet we must certainly understand him as speaking in general terms, with respect to all periods indiscriminately: as much as to say, 'There is no man, at any time, or in any place, who bears the amiable character, but he shall receive the gracious reward. That our Saviour meant those of his own time, as well as those of other times, providing they answered the description given, is freely granted. And, upon the same principle, it will not be refused, that the Apostle means all powers, answering to the characters which he gives; but still it must remain to be determined, whether Nero be one of these. That he existed in his time, is known; but that he answered his description of the lawful power, is much, and justly, questioned. When the Preacher says, "There *BE* just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: Again, there *BE* wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous;" ‡ every one must allow, that he is speaking, in general terms, concerning what happens in the world, at all periods; without confining his attention to the men of his own time, more than to those of other times. It would appear, therefore, that, after all the mighty noise we have heard, concerning these two little words, "ΤΗΑΤ *BE*," as though they were, "A serpent by the way, an adder in the path,—a serpent that must not be roused, but upon our peril;" † they do not give the smallest countenance to that interpretation, which makes the inspired Apostle to mean those very bloody and

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† Mark x. 29, 30. ‡ Eccl. viii. 14. † Loy. p. 15.

tyrannical powers, then actually existing in Rome. An interpretation which receives all its plausibility from playing on the bare sound of the word *æ*; without properly attending to the well-known phraseology of Scripture. I am not alone, in this opinion, concerning the scope of the passage before us. The words of the great Mr. Herle, who was Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, after Dr. Twiss, are, expressly to the same purpose. “The powers here are said to be ordained of God, and verse 2d. to be the ordinance of God.—The Apostle speaks in the general, without application to the Roman or any other, but on the contrary, it is stood upon, that he intends his precept of a lawfully called Magistrate.” *

It is one great beauty of Divine Revelation, that it contains standing rules, for directing the faith and practice of mankind, in all the diversified situations, and relations of life; whether, for the time being, they may actually fill some of these relations, or not. Whenever they come into the circumstances described; then the rule, given for the direction of their conduct in such circumstances, properly applies. And, indeed, this idea is inseparable from a complete and universal standard; by which truth and error, sin and duty, or right and wrong, are ascertained, in every supposable case, and the line of distinction so fairly drawn, that no one, when he finds himself actually in such a case, should be at any loss to know the path of duty. This being the case, there is no absurdity, in teaching what are the respective duties of magistrates, and subjects, although, for the present, there should not be any formally organized legislature; or none properly deserving the honourable name.—JEHOVAH himself taught the sons of Jacob, how they were to regulate their conduct, with regard to their princes, and also how their princes were to behave, hundreds of years before they had a king. † Query, Were these precepts of any use to Israel, at that time?

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* Dissertations, p. 126. 131.

† Deut. xvii. 14,—20. comp. Acts xiii. 20.

The Martyrs, with whom Seceders wish to claim kindred, were no strangers to the doctrine, of owning Magistracy in the abstract; and, at the same time, disowning these human administrators, in whom the power was vested, for the time being. “—I charge you,” says James Stewart, in his last speech, “to beware of misconstruing my sufferings, and saying that I was suffering for disowning of authority, and declining of judges; for it is not so, I being a Presbyterian in my judgment, and owning both magistracy and ministry, according to the word of God, and as he hath ordained them: but if Charles Stuart’s authority be according to the word of God, I am mistaken. If he be exercising his power, to the terrifying of evil-doers, and the encouraging of them that do well, I die in an error.” †

Mr. Fletcher goes on: “According to this abstract sense, Paul has exhorted all the churches of Christ, from his own day to the end of the world,—to submit practically to the ordinance of Magistracy in itself.” ‡ Certainly he exhorted them, always, to consider Magistracy as an ordinance of God; and to demean themselves accordingly. If providence should ever order their lot under such magistrates, as he describes; let them carefully remember, that even the religion of Jesus, notwithstanding all the unjust reproaches cast upon it, expressly requires, to own and obey such, as the ministers of God. for good. And, if their lot should fall even where there are no lawful magistrates, none but tyrants and usurpers; yet still let their behaviour be harmless and blameless, as the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; plainly manifesting, by every part of their conduct, that they are the friends of order, and that it is their constant study, to lead quiet and inoffensive lives, in all godliness and honesty. We have the vanity to think, that even supposing the Apostle, to have exhorted the Christians after this manner; there is nothing either ridiculous, or absurd, in it. Meanwhile, were we

† Cloud of Wit. p. (*mibi*) 220.

‡ Def. p. 19, 20.

to treat Mr. Fletcher's comment, as he doth ours; how easy would it be, to turn his artillery against himself: "If that sense, which makes the Apostle enjoin subjection to Nero, be true, it must be invariable, for the meaning of Scripture doth not change with the times: accordingly, Paul has exhorted all the churches, from his own day to the end of the world, practically to submit, not to lawful magistrates in general, but to Nero and the other existing powers at Rome in particular." Even a babe in knowledge may see, that the conclusion is just as fair, in the one case, as it is in the other. Though it is frankly acknowledged, that none of them are genteel. And this should not have been mentioned here, but merely for the purpose of shewing Mr. Fletcher, what he might expect; were others to take the same freedoms with his expressions, which he takes with theirs. Because Mr. Steven taught, that it was practicable for Christians, in the constant tenor of their lives, to shew themselves friends to civil order, even where there was not, for the time, any organized legislature; did he, therefore, teach, that they were not to be subject to lawful magistrates, even when they could obtain them? No such idea ever entered into his mind, or was ever expressed by him.

"Mr. Steven," says his opponent, "uses another argument, p. 54. for supporting his abstract sense, and it is drawn from 1 Cor. vi. 1.—But the two passages are by no means parallel. In the one, Paul exhorts the Romans to obey magistrates; and, in the other, he reprehends the Corinthians, for going to law with one-another about trifling matters, which might easily have been decided by friendly arbitration. The consideration of these passages as parallel, is a manifest perversion of the meaning of both; for it makes the enjoining of a duty, and the reprehension of a sin, to be one and the same thing." † The reader will be pleased, to look into the quoted page of Mr Steven's Letter; and he will see, that he speaks not a single word, neither about an ab-

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† Def. p. 22, 23.

straight sense, nor about these passages being either parallel, or unparallel. He views the one as helping to explain the other. And assigns his reasons, why he considers the Apostle as reprehending the Corinthians, not simply for going to law with those things, which might be settled by friendly arbitration; but for going to law, on whatever pretence, before infidel and incompetent judges. This last he considers as the thing, upon which the Apostle chiefly rests his reproof. And, therefore concludes, that we cannot consistently with this, suppose him to mean such infidel and incompetent judges as these, in that other passage, Rom. xiii. 1.—6. inasmuch as the higher powers there mentioned, instead of being such as we should shun, are plainly such as even Christians are bound in conscience to own; whose tribunals they should ever reverence; and whom they ought always to consider as appointed of God, for the very purpose of punishing evil doers, and defending those who do well. That the enjoining of duty is one thing, and the reprehension of sin is another, can easily be discovered; nor is it much more difficult to see, agreeably to what Mr. Steven here supposes, that both those Scriptures which enjoin duty, and those which reprove sin, may be of special use for making us understand more clearly, what is sin, and what is duty; who are the ministers of God, and who are not. But the attentive reader will, at once, see, that our friend, Mr. Fletcher, in place of ever touching his opponent's arguments, or deigning to drop a single word, in reply to any of them; frames, and answers, a question entirely new, and concerning which, there never was any dispute between him and us, namely, Whether these two passages of Scripture, above mentioned, be parallel, or not?

While Mr. Fletcher, in his glossing this passage, 1 Cor. vi. 1.—8. refuses Mr. Steven's view of it, and excludes the consideration of the magistrates before whom, and of their incapacity, on account of their being Heathens, and Idolaters; I am afraid, that he will not receive much countenance from the best Expositors; of whom

whom he, sometimes, seems rather disposed to boast. Guyse, Piscator, Pool's Synopsis, Henry's and Pool's Continuators, with many others, take all particular notice of the Heathen Magistrate's incompetency, to act in these matters, as that upon which the reproof turns; allowing at the same time, indeed, that the Corinthians are also reprov'd for going to law at all, about these differences, which might be settled otherwise. Guyse, in giving the contents of the chapter, says, "The Apostle cautions the Corinthians against going to law one with another, especially in Heathen courts, ver. 1.—8. And in the paraphrase on ver. 1.—"Is it not a rash, unnecessary and unwarrantable venture,—for any of you who have a matter of controversy with a Christian brother about civil affairs, to enter immediately into a law-suit against him, and try it in a litigious way before Heathen magistrates, who are avowed enemies to Christianity;—and from whom impartial justice to its professors is not ordinarily to be expected." Which interpretation exactly corresponds with that which Mr. Steven hath given.

In opposition to Mr. Fletcher's scheme of interpreting Rom. xiii. 1,—7. Mr. Steven had objected, "That it entirely strips the martyrs, under the reign of Charles II. and James VII. of any countenance from Scripture precept or example, for their conduct in rejecting and disowning their authority." † Mr. Fletcher replies, "If this objection had been duly pondered, it would never have seen the sun. The conduct of the best of men must stand and be judged at the bar of Scripture.—But, according to this objection, the Scripture must stand, and be judged at the bar of human conduct.—Idolatry is forbidden in the second commandment; but how absurd would it be to conclude, that it is not forbidden, because this scheme of interpretation gives no countenance to the conduct of Israel, who made a calf in Horeb, and worshipp'd the molten image! Murder is forbidden in the sixth commandment; but
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† Let. p. 88.

how unreasonable would it be to infer, that it is not forbidden, because this scheme of interpretation gives no countenance to the conduct of David in killing Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the children of Ammon." *

When prejudice takes the place of candour; nothing will please. Mr. Thorburn had taught, that "We have a better and surer rule to direct our moral conduct, than the practice of the best and holiest men that ever lived." And that "Nevertheless when Scripture examples are pretended to be agreeable to Scripture precepts, they must be taken notice of †." As much as to say, When examples are agreeable to the precept, they should be followed; but when they are not, they cannot be considered as any rule to us. Doctriné, one should think, not very unlike to that which Mr. Fletcher himself here teaches, when he says, that "The conduct of the best of men must stand, and be judged at the bar of Scripture. — And should commentators walk by the conduct even of confessors and martyrs as a rule, they would make void the law of God by their expositions." ‡ Immediately, however, the Loyalist, citing as his proof, that very part of Mr. Thorburn's book just mentioned, cries out, "That the Reformed Brethren have rejected the approved examples of saints in Scripture." † On the other hand, knowing that the conduct of the martyrs, under the reigns of Charles II. and James VII. had already been tried, at the bar of Scripture, and got an honourable testimony, to the propriety of it, from both Seceders, and Dissenters; Mr. Steven justly takes its agreeableness to the Scripture-precept, at present, for granted. And then he charges his opponent's interpretation of Rom. xiii. 1,—7. with this absurdity, That it strips the martyrs of any countenance, from Scripture-precept and example, for their conduct, accusing them of wantonly throwing away their lives, by carrying their principles beyond what was required from men,

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* Def. p. 30, 31.

† Vindiciæ Mag. p. 104.

‡ Def. p. 30.

‡ Scrip. Loy. p. 76.

in their situation; for if, agreeably to Mr. Fletcher's doctrine, such bloody and persecuting tyrants as Nero were to be owned, and submitted to, for conscience' sake, unquestionably, upon the same principle, such bloody and persecuting tyrants as Charles II. and James VII. should also have been owned, and submitted unto. The necessary consequence from which is, that the martyrs, under these reigns, must have died in an error; while, in place of owning, they rejected the then authority. Let Mr. Fletcher therefore shew how he is consistent with himself, in passing very high encomiums on these martyrs' conduct; and, at the same time teaching such doctrine, as unavoidably leads us to this conclusion, that instead of resisting and striving against sin, they died resisting the power which was ordained of God, and to which they should have been subject, for conscience' sake. Meanwhile, it is clear as noon-day, that it is only the good, and approved examples, of these renowned worthies, which Mr. Steven, all along, considers as deserving our regard, and imitation. And to this, we should have thought, Mr. Fletcher himself need not have objected; seeing his own doctrine is, "That the approved examples of the saints in Scripture are as much the rule of our duty, as the precepts of the moral law."* But still Mr. Fletcher must find fault; if it should be, for teaching exactly his own doctrine, and therefore, he now complains upon his opponent, as though he taught, "That Scripture is to stand, and be judged at the bar of human conduct." Yea, by introducing these two examples of very atrocious wickedness, Israel's gross idolatry and David's very aggravated murder, he evidently supposes him to have taught, that all the saints' examples, whether good or bad, were set for our imitation. But of this Mr. Steven never dreamt, nor is there the remotest hint of any such thing, neither in his, nor in any of his brethren's writings. It is presumed, Mr. Fletcher himself, after serious consideration, will find, that these two instances of very shameful blunders

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* Scrip. Loy. p. 20.

in professing faints, and the honourable conduct of the late martyrs, in resisting unto blood, striving against sin, are at least as far from being parallel, as the two fore-mentioned passages of Scripture, Rom. xiii. 1,—7. and 1 Cor. vi. 1,—8. Why then is the invidious comparison insinuated; and conclusions drawn, from the one case to the other? Mr. Fletcher certainly knows, that, if we would be candid, there is no proper dispute between Seceders and Dissenters, concerning the duty of following those, who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises. Such examples, as are agreeable to the divine law, we should carefully imitate; and such as are not, we should no less carefully, shun, though set by the best of men. In this we are all agreed.—But Mr. Steven is speaking about the true spirit, and tendency, of those examples, which had been uniformly approved by both parties. And it is truly astonishing, that ever Mr. Fletcher could allow himself, to pervert his words, in a manner so exceedingly ungentle, that even charity, which thinketh no evil, can scarcely cover. If controversies, amongst the professing friends of Christ, are still to be thus managed; “Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph!”

Mr. Fletcher labours, and indeed it much concerns him, to have it established, that even the martyrs, under the two Royal Brothers, though they rejected the ecclesiastical supremacy; yet did not properly disown the civil authority of these princes. “It was not,” says he, “the civil, but the ecclesiastical usurped authority, in and over the church, which they rejected and disowned, as their faithful testimonies plainly declare.”* If he mean to say, They did not refuse, that these princes, notwithstanding all that they had done, in violating the fundamental laws of the kingdom, had still a just title to the British throne, and were actually clothed with such lawful authority, as ought to be owned, and submitted to, for conscience’ sake; their own words, it is presumed, will prove, that he is mistaken.

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* Def. p. 32,—36.

With respect to these few renowned champions, who concurred in the Queen's-ferry Paper, and who expressly renounced all allegiance to King Charles II. Mr. Fletcher, indeed, hesitates much about the propriety of their conduct, in this matter; † and no wonder, for he cannot possibly approve of it, but at the expence of entirely ruining his own cause. They were but a very small minority; and yet they rejected the then existing powers. But he produces, from the speeches of other martyrs, some extracts, which he considers as making more for his purpose. And it is truly astonishing, that even Mr. Cargil's speech finds a place among these. The following part of it is cited by Mr. Fletcher. "As to the cause of my suffering, the main is not acknowledging the present authority, as it is established in the supremacy and Explanatory Act. This is the Magistracy that I have rejected, that was invested with Christ's power." But does our opponent suppose, that such as truly respect the memory of these noble martyrs, will read only a part of their speeches, and stop short in the midst of a paragraph. The very same Mr. Cargil, in the same speech, yea, in the same paragraph too, hath these express words, "—Seeing it (the supremacy) made the essential of the crown, there is no distinction we can make, that can free the conscience of the acknowledger, from being a partaker of this sacrilegious robbing of God. And it is but to cheat our consciences, to acknowledge the CIVIL POWER; for it is not civil power only that is made of the essence of his crown: And seeing they are so express, we ought to be plain; for otherwise it is to deny our testimony, and consent to his robbery." ‡ I am afraid, that Mr. Fletcher must be found guilty, either of uncharitably supposing, that this venerable martyr knew not what he was saying, when, in so many words, he declared, that the acknowledging even of the civil power, was but a cheating of the conscience; or else, of insulting his reader, by producing this speech, as favouring his side of the question.

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† Def. p. 34, 35. ‡ Cloud of Wit. Edit. Glas. 1779. p. 37.

The next in order, in the Cloud of Witnesses, is Mr. Smith, student of Theology. In his speech, he affirms, “—This is the main point, this day, in controversy, upon which I was peremptorily questioned, and desired positively to answer, yea, or nay, under the threatening of the boots, *viz.* Whether I owned the King’s authority, as presently established and exercised? Which I did positively disown, and denied allegiance to him, as he is invested with that supremacy proper to Jesus Christ only. And who knoweth not, that at first he was constituted and crowned a covenanted king, and the subjects sworn in allegiance to him, as such, by the Solemn League and Covenant.—But the whole of this pleaded-for authority, at present, is established on the ruin of the land’s engagements to God, and to one-another.” † Still, indeed, the supremacy is particularly mentioned; not, however, as the alone thing which they rejected, while they owned the authority in other things; but as the formal reason why they disowned the authority altogether. The king’s authority is expressly mentioned, “as presently established and exercised.” For they had sense enough to discern, that, in any other view, it was a non-entity; the king had no other regal authority, neither to be owned, nor disowned.

James Boig, also student of Theology, is next in the list. In his last testimony are these words,—“We could not own the authority as presently established, unless we should also own the supremacy, which the king hath usurped over the church; because the supremacy is declared in their acts of parliament, to be essential to the crown; and that which is essential to any thing, is the same with the thing itself: so that, in owning their authority, we are of necessity obliged to justify them in their usurpation also.” ‡ Mr. Boig speaks of the king’s authority in general, under a distinct consideration from the supremacy; yet he supposes it simply impossible to own the one without the other; see-

† Cloud of Wit. p. 57.

‡ p. 61, 62.

seeing the supremacy was made essential to the crown. "These chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," did not, it seems, possess the penetration of some, who claim the honour, of being their successors; otherwise, they might have seen it abundantly consistent, to own a civil government, not only as just and lawful, but as the best government under heaven; without in the least owning that Prelacy and that Headship over the church, which are the very ground-work of the constitution; and positively declared, by public deeds and laws of the nation, to be essential to the crown. † Poor Dissenter's, indeed, must claim no kindred with these champions for civil and religious liberty; though they think exactly as they thought; namely, that it is impossible to own any authority, in the strict and proper sense of owning and acknowledging, without, at the same time, owning these things, which are made essential to the wearing of the crown, and swaying the sceptre; and without which it is not allowed to do either the one, or the other, for a single moment, till the existing fundamental conditions of rule be altered.

Robert Gray, another of these faithful witnesses, in a letter which he acknowledged to be his own hand-writ, and to which he still adhered, when he was interrogated before the Council, expresses himself thus, "—In answer to that, about owning this tyrant in ecclesiastic matters. I hope it is without all doubt and debate, with all the zealous exercised Christians in Scotland, that he should not be owned at all in it.—And as for owning him in CIVIL THINGS, to me it is very clear, now as matters are

† In fixing the succession to the British Crown, at the Revolution; one article was, "That whosoever shall hereafter come to the possession of this Crown, shall join in communion with the Church of England, as by law established." This was made an essential condition of wearing the Crown. Judge Blackstone, in his Commentaries on the Laws of England, declares, "The king is considered, by the laws of England, as the head and supreme governor of the national church.—In virtue of this authority the king convenes, prorogues, restrains, regulates, and dissolves all ecclesiastical synods or convocations." Thus far he. See Mr. Steven's Posthumous Let. p. 41,—44.

are stated, that he should not be owned." † It is observable, that he immediately assigns several reasons, why he could not own him, even in civil things.

James Robertson, who ranks in the same honourable list, speaking of the king, in his last speech, says, "—As to that which is so much pleaded for by this generation, his authority in CIVIL MATTERS, which as matters now stand cannot be given, neither will they have it without the other: for, by their acts of parliament, they have made them equally essentially to the crown: Likewise there cannot be an authority without a foundation." ‡ This plain and honest martyr wanted penetration to discern, how an authority can, strictly speaking, be just and lawful; while the fundamental conditions, upon which it is held and exercised, are positively sinful. He not only maintained, that the rulers would not have the civil, without the ecclesiastic authority; but, that the one could not, consistently, be given, any more than the other, as matters now stood. But we need not unnecessarily swell this pamphlet, by producing more instances.

Let the reader carefully consult the Cloud of Witnesses, from beginning to end; and he will find, that all the martyrs, whose speeches are there recorded, and who spoke of the king's authority at all, did, to a man, totally reject the powers that were. Several of them, as we have seen, spoke professedly on the subject; and, in so many words, flatly deny the king's authority altogether, both in civil, and ecclesiastic matters. Many others solemnly declared their adherence to the Testimonies of those, who had gone before, and to the Sanquhar Declaration, the Queensferry-paper, and other Deeds of that kind; in which the existing powers were wholly rejected, and positively pronounced tyrants. The number of those, who said little or nothing on that subject, was very small. And though some few, upon interrogation, gave sort of indirect answers; such as, "I own all authority, which is agreeable

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† Cloud of Wit, p 229.

‡ p. 244.

to the Word of God.”—“ I own them, as they are a terror to evil doers, and the praise of them that do well.”—“ I own them, in as far as they own Christ and his cause,” and such like; yet both they, and their accusers, knew perfectly well, that these answers amounted to the same thing, as a positive rejection of the then present authority altogether; in as much as it was well known to be the very reverse of that, which they described. Shall we still be told, “ It was not the CIVIL AUTHORITY which the martyrs rejected and disowned?” If so; the assertion must be applied to some other martyrs then these. That those, who suffered, in the former period of that bloody persecution, owned the authority in general, and satisfied themselves with openly testifying against particular acts of mal-administration, is well known; but no sooner did the Explanatory Act declare the supremacy to be essential to the crown, than the faithful in the land began to see the propriety of wholly rejecting that authority, which was held and exercised, on such a footing. Many, indeed, saw it long before. And though there be, among the sufferers, some few instances of owning and praying for the king, even after the year 1669, which is the date of the Explanatory Act; yet it was done in such a conditional and qualified manner, as amounted to much the same thing, with a disavowal of his title to the throne of these covenanted kingdoms.

From the above extracts the following things are sufficiently obvious. 1st. That all these martyrs in general, whose speeches are recorded in the Cloud of Witnesses, and who suffered during the last eight years of the persecution, totally rejected the powers that then were; both in their civil authority, and in their ecclesiastical supremacy. The question ordinarily put to them was not, Own ye the king’s supremacy over the church? but, Own ye the king’s authority? To which they answered in the negative. 2dly, That the openly avowed, and formal reasons of the rejection were, The sinful conditions, on which the authority was now held and exercised; and not because the rulers wanted the majority,

jority, of the nation upon their side. The majority, both in church and state, these rulers unquestionably had, for several years after the martyrs disowned their authority; as every one, who attentively reads the histories of that period, will plainly see. The Privy Councils, Parliaments, Armies, Civil and Military Courts of Judgment, together with the Judicatories of the Church, were all on the Ruler's side; while the martyrs were only a small despised handful of individual ministers and people. 3dly, That these noble sufferers, in the cause of truth, were wholly unacquainted with the Seceding doctrine, "That all those who have a constitution by the consent of civil society, are to be submitted unto for the Lord's sake, or, as having an institution from him." And, "That we are ordered to yield submission, without farther question, to every ordinance of man, every person in civil office by the will of society." † These "chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof" judged it requisite, to ask many farther questions; before they could, in conscience acknowledge and submit to the authority of those, who were then in civil office, by the will of even the national society. They must find, if the ancient fundamental laws of the kingdom be overturned; the Covenants, once solemnly sworn by all ranks in the land, broken and contemned; the civil rights and liberties of the subject destroyed; and the heritage of the Lord grievously oppressed, by many wicked and Erastian encroachments made upon it.— If they find these, and such like things now done, agreeably to the altered and new-modelled constitution, and in virtue of a boasted prerogative royal; this they reckon reason, more than sufficient, for disowning the powers that be, even by the will of society. Which sentiments are just the soul of Dissenting principles. 4thly, It is no less obvious from the above extracts, that Mr. Fletcher must either retract these assertions, "It is false, that the martyrs disowned the civil authority of the Royal Brothers," and, "It was not the civil, but the ecclesiastic usurped authority, which they rejected;" ‡

or

† See Declar. of Prin. p. 76, 77.

‡ Def. p. 31, 32.

or, otherwise, he must refuse the plain and honest declarations of these martyrs themselves, as proper evidence in the case. He will also find himself reduced to this other dilemma, either plainly, and honestly, speak it out; that these martyrs, whose speeches are contained in the Cloud of Witnesses, were wrong, and died in an error, as we grant they were only fallible men; or else, renounce that doctrine, that the minority have no right to reject these powers, who are still acknowledged by the body politic, or majority of the nation. Our opponent may take either of the sides he pleases; but one of them, will he, will he, he must take.

Mr. Fletcher, very unhappily, I should think, for his own cause, grants, "That it was the duty of the nation, or of a majority in it, to reject and depose their King and inferior Rulers, because they had turned the sceptre of civil government into the serpent of tyranny; and it was their sin and punishment that they bore the yoke of oppression so long." † To this we heartily subscribe; and it exactly corresponds with the sentiments of these sufferers themselves, who, after the year 1669, were resisting unto blood, striving against sin. In their causes for a public fast, they reckon their being so far behind, in this matter, as one of the steps of defection, over which they had to lament. Now, to have rejected and deposed the King, and inferior rulers, would certainly have been to disown them, with a witness, both in civil and ecclesiastic things. It is therefore granted, that it was the duty of the nation, totally to reject the authority of Charles II. and James VII. not only at the time when the martyrs did it, but even long before; for "It was their sin that they bore the yoke of oppression so long." Let it also be observed, that if the said authority, as is agreed on both sides, should have been rejected, even to the deposition of the powers which then were; it must have been unlawful authority; for Mr. Fletcher well knows that "Disloyalty," and certainly rejection and deposition are nothing less, "to the

JUST and LEGAL authority of princes, is rebellion against God, and very hurtful to the religion of Jesus Christ."† Query, How doth it appear, that the authority of Charles II. and James VII. who "turned the sceptre of civil government into the serpent of tyranny," was unlawful authority, which, Mr. Fletcher himself being judge, should have been totally disowned and rejected by the whole nation, who should have deposed these princes; while, at the same time, the authority of a Pharaoh, a Nebuchadnezzar, or a monstrous Nero, who, at least in an equal, or rather still more terrible manner, turned the sceptre of civil government, into the serpent of tyranny," was the lawful authority ordained of God, to which the Lord's people were to be subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake. How comes it to pass, that among powers of the same kind, and answering to the same description, some are lawful, and must not be resisted, but under pain of damnation; while others are unlawful, and should be rejected and deposed? A proper solution will be very acceptable to Dissenters, and to some others too. It will not, I hope, be pled, that the mere sinfully delaying to perform a plain duty, could alter the nature of things, and legitimate a government, which was, in itself, positively sinful, and tyrannical. Nor will the distinguishing between the majority and the minority, be any salvo in the matter. It hath been fairly granted, that it was the sin of the majority, to own and submit to these tyrannical powers, so long as they did; for, instead of that, they should have deposed them. What was the sin of the majority, could not, surely, be the duty of the minority; unless that either sin and duty be convertible terms, or that the mere will of a majority be the standard of right and wrong, independent of JEHOVAH's will. We are therefore necessarily brought to this conclusion, That there have been, and still may be cases, in which even the powers that actually exist, in the course of adorable providence, and by the will of a nation too, ought not
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to be owned, neither by the majority, nor minority. And though the one should, for a time, either not discern their duty, or neglect to perform it; that can be no proper reason why the other should do so likewise. So soon as the way of truth is discovered, whether by more or fewer; it ought to be actually followed.

Mr. Fletcher next proceeds to oppose, what he seems to reckon his opponent's doctrine, concerning prayer for wicked Magistrates. † I am truly sorry to find, that this part of the dispute also is managed in a very uncandid manner. I should think, it is scarcely possible, that Mr. Fletcher, if he read without prejudice, could really persuade himself to believe, that ever Mr. Steven, in his Letter, taught any such doctrine, as that which he here sets himself to oppose. Mr. Steven freely grants, that we should pray for all sorts of men in general, civil rulers by no means excepted; but the praying of which he is speaking, and of which alone he complains, is a praying for tyrants, or for any unlawful rulers whatsoever, in that formal, prescribed, and unqualified manner, which is considered, on all hands, as importing a recognizing of their title; while, at the same time, the person so praying cannot, in judgment and conscience, approve of the fundamental laws and conditions, on the footing of which these rulers hold and exercise their power. ‡ This, and this alone, is the sort of prayer, which Mr. Steven opposes. But the judicious and candid reader will easily perceive, that every sentence of what Mr. Fletcher here says on the subject, strikes directly against a fictitious doctrine of his own contrivance, and which was never taught by any Dissenter, in Scotland; namely, that we should not pray for Magistrates at all, even when clothed with lawful authority; and, especially, that we should not pray for wicked rulers, nor indeed for wicked men of any description, who are our avowed enemies, neither in one shape nor other, no not for conviction, repentance, or reformation unto them; but should rather wish

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† Def. p. 36,—50.

‡ See his Let. p. 14,—26.

the vengeance of the Almighty to be inflicted upon them. This, and this alone, is the doctrine which Mr. Fletcher opposes. And it was, certainly, as strongly opposed by Mr. Steven, both in principle and practice, and is still as strongly opposed, by all his surviving brethren, to a man, as ever it could be by Seceders, or any other. Let any sensible and impartial judge, carefully compare together these parts of the Letter and Defence, cited at the bottom of the page; and it shall be freely submitted to him, whether the observations now made, be just; and, consequently, whether the whole of Mr. Steven's reasoning, on this part of the subject, do not stand exactly as it was, without being ever so much as touched by the Defence. Our opponent's mode of thus, suddenly and unexpectedly, shifting ground, and totally altering the state of the question, in the course of his replies, † is exceedingly unfair. It may, perhaps, impose upon the weak, superficial and inattentive reader; but the deceit must be seen at once, by every man of penetration, who carefully looks into the subject. I hope we agree, that it is duty to pray for all sorts of men in general, whether they be kings, or subjects; high, or low; rich, or poor; professors, or profane; friends, or foes. The Scripture makes only one exception, in the case of persons known to have sinned the sin unto death; or, which amounts to the same thing, known, by a particular revelation of the divine mind, to be already doomed unto everlasting destruction. And we must all be guided by the Holy Scriptures, with regard to the extent of our prayers. The dispute is about the particular modes of praying; what such and such sorts of prayer necessarily imply.

In the 20th. page of his Letter, Mr. Steven had said, "The Church and her members have often prayed, that kings might be nursing fathers, and their queens her nursing mothers, and judges might be restored as at the first, and counsellors as at the beginning, that officers
might

† See Def. p. 39.

might be peace, and exactors righteousness, when such had no real being, as to them, but in the promise; and yet were not branded and abused, for praying for magistracy, or lawful authority, in the abstract." Does Mr. Fletcher venture to deny this? No; neither he, nor any man alive, can deny it, but at the expence of contradicting the Sacred Oracles. The prophecy, referred to, * not only looks forward to the return of the Jews from Babylon, though even that was then a future blessing, but it evidently looks forward to the calling of the Gentiles, in New Testament times; an event which was not to take place, till several hundred years after the prophecy was uttered. But it was certainly the duty, and would be the actual exercise of faithful wrestlers, who waited for the consolation of Israel, to plead the accomplishment of what the Lord had graciously spoken; while as yet they saw it only afar off. It is observable, that in both the passages, to which Mr. Steven's assertion alludes, the calling of the Gentiles is expressly mentioned, in the verse immediately preceding. However, although Mr. Fletcher can neither contradict his opponent's doctrine, nor offer so much as the shadow of a reason, to shew that it is false; yet something must be said, in return. He tells us, that what Mr. Steven said,—"Is very weak and trifling reasoning to one who knows, that there is neither precept nor example in the Book of God to warrant a *praying for, and a wishing well to the ordinance of Magistracy in the abstract.*—Which," says he, "is a non-entity, and absolutely incapable of receiving any benefit, by prayer and good wishes." † Is Mr. Steven speaking here of magistracy in the abstract, when he mentions, in express terms, "kings, queens, judges, counsellors, officers and exactors?" But if, after all, magistracy in the abstract be, indeed, a non-entity; it is great pity, that Mr. Fletcher should have opened so many powerful batteries, for its destruction. And it is no less pity, that he should have inadvertently stammered on that mode of expression,

which

* Isa. xlix. 23. and lx. 17. † Def. p. 38.

which we find in the 55th. page of the Loyalist: "MAGISTRACY is an ordinance instituted by God." To be consistent, he should certainly have said, MAGISTRATES, in the concrete; for to say, that a non-entity is instituted by God, would be intolerable. Mr. Fletcher proceeds, and tells us, "When prayer is made by the Church, that Kings may be nursing-fathers, &c. it may be, and very frequently is understood of civil rulers presently existing." * Be it so; that makes nothing against Mr. Steven's doctrine: for we have just shewn, that it also has been, and yet may be understood of civil rulers, who have, for the present, no existence, except in the promise; and who may not be actually obtained, for hundreds of years after the promise is given. Which is all that is necessary, for establishing our doctrine. But, "It is the duty of Protestants in Popish countries, to pray, that their Popish Magistrates may become nursing-fathers to the church." † Before they could properly become nursing-fathers to a Protestant, or Presbyterian Church; it would, I apprehend, be requisite to have as great an alteration made, with respect both to the footing on which they hold their authority, and to their external profession of religion, as that which Dissenters themselves wish, with respect to the British rulers, and their constitution. We are further told, "To plead, that we should pray for Magistrates when they are good, and for Magistracy in the abstract when they are bad, is to make the changeable dispensations of providence the rule of duty." ‡ But neither Mr. Steven, nor any of his brethren, ever taught any such doctrine. They teach, that when magistrates, who have a just and legal title to the places which they fill, are actually obtained by a people; it is, then, the duty of that people, to pray for these magistrates, formally considered as such; sincerely wishing, that the Lord may graciously bless, direct and prosper them, in the administration of their righteous government. But when, in the righteous judgment of God,

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* Def. p. 38. † p. 38, 39. ‡ p. 39.

vile men, who act the tyrant, and usurp a blasphemous supremacy over the church of Christ, happen to be exalted; then, and in all such cases, we have no warrant from Scripture to pray for such monsters, formally considered as rulers; because they either never had any just title to that dignity; or, if they ever had, they have now wholly forfeited it, by violating the fundamental conditions of government. Yet for these very persons, simply considered as fellow-men and sinners of the human race, or, if you will, as unjust rulers set up by the nation, but evidently holding and exercising their power on sinful terms, we may earnestly implore the pardoning mercy and rich grace of God; wishing that they may be brought to sincere repentance, an open renouncing of the sinful conditions, on which they have been advanced, and to a speedy amendment. This was exactly the case with the martyrs, especially during the last eight years of the persecution. They positively refused to pray, in the loose, unqualified and prescribed form, "God save the King;" because that was considered by both them and their persecutors, as recognizing his title to the magistratical power; the justness of which they could by no means grant. But does this say, that they indulged malice in their heart, or had any personal hatred at the men, who were then in power, by the will of society; or, that they had any objection to pray for their bodily health, temporal happiness, or everlasting salvation? Certainly not: he who would charge them with this, would, indeed, bring a "false accusation against men, of whom the world was not worthy; would represent them not as martyrs for the cause of God and truth, but as evil doers, as rebels against the authority of Christ."

I am aware, that our opponent will immediately cry out, We have compared the British Rulers to monsters, tyrants and usurpers; and at the expence of doing so, have defended our refusal to pray for them, in the usual form. No such thing, however, is intended. Dissenters can establish every iota of their doctrine, without ever considering these Rulers either as monsters, tyrants,

or usurpers. They know, as well as Seceders, that the British Magistrates rule on the footing of the Constitution, framed, and, from time to time, variously modified, by the representatives of the nation. Yea, they rule by the consent of the majority in the kingdom. But the same general principle may be gone upon, while the several objects, to which it is applied, are much diversified. We may refuse to recognize the title of some rulers, because they are monsters and tyrants; and refuse to recognize the title of others, because, however amiable their personal character, or mild their administration, yet the fundamental conditions of their advancement are positively sinful. It is the prayer, necessarily involving an approbation of such conditions, against which we contend. The sum of what Dissenters teach, on the subject, is plainly and simply this, Unless they can be satisfied, in their own mind, with respect to the magistrate's just and Scriptural title unto the place which he actually fills; they have no clearness to pray, in such an unqualified form, as is considered, both by themselves and the requirers, to be a recognizing of that title: meanwhile, they can sincerely wish the persons well, in body and soul, in time and through eternity. If Mr. Fletcher can prove this to be absurd and erroneous; we are willing to hear him. But he must go to work in some other manner than by continually manufacturing doctrines, which we never taught, and of which we never entertained the most distant thought.

To what he reckons his opponent's mode of praying, Mr. Fletcher also objects, that "It makes the changeable dispensations of providence the rule of duty." But we should have expected him to have been the last man, who would have objected to this, even supposing, though it is not really the case, that Mr. Steven had said it. Mr. Fletcher and his brethren have uniformly taught, That all providential magistrates, are also preceptive; *i. e.* if language have any meaning at all, Whoever, in course of holy providence, actually fills a throne, by the voice of a majority in the nation, let him be otherwise what he may, he is a lawful magistrate; it is agree-

agreeable to the precept, that he should reign; and he hath a just claim to conscientious obedience, from every soul within the territory. But it has often happened, that the same person has been a subject to day, murdered his prince, and ascended his throne to-morrow, yea and been acknowledged, or allowed to reign, by the people too. † We will also find, in the course of divine providence, a rebellious Absalom possessing the royal residence and attended by the majority of Israel to day, but put to death; and David, his father, reigning to-morrow. According to Seceding doctrine; these striking dispensations of providence would have taught, before the rebellion to have prayed, God save King David; when Absalom was at the height of his career, God save King Absalom; and again, when he was dead, and his father re-ascended the throne, God save King David. Of such doctrine it would appear to be a pretty native consequence, That the changeable dispensations of providence are, in some things at least, the rule of duty. No person, who reads, with candour, the Sacred History of Absalom's rebellion, can hesitate a moment about his having the majority on his side. It is not indeed said in so many words; but several parts of the narrative are remarkably expressive. He used his insinuating methods with "All Israel that came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." He "sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel.—The conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom. There came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom." The counsel which advised, "That all Israel should be gathered unto him, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that he should go to battle in his own person," was that which was approved and adopted by "Absalom and all the men of Israel." It is also said, "The people of Israel were slain before the servants of David; and there was there a great slaughter that day, of twenty thousand."

† See, besides human history, 2 Kings xv.

thousand men." *i. e.* Twenty thousand of the rebels, as it is generally understood. Yet even that vast number doth not seem to have been much missed from the general multitude, who had anointed Absalom over them; and who returned again to their allegiance unto their lawful prince. — "All the people were at strife, throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hands of our enemies.—And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle." The terms are still remarkably general and comprehensive. But the royal army is denominated thus, "The servants of David." A term more particular and restrictive-like. *

Mr. Fletcher is exceedingly displeas'd with his opponent's exposition of Jer. xxix. 7. Mr. Steven, in his Letter had said, "It is manifest, that this prayer recommended to the captives, includes no duty they owed, either to the Babylonish Monarch, or to the city and the inhabitants thereof, as if either had been a blessing unto them. On the contrary, they were a curse, and the rod of God's judgment to punish them for their sins, for the removal of which, in his own time, it was their duty to pray. The subject matter of the prayer, therefore, is solely their own peace and happiness, during the time appointed them to sojourn there." † After carefully reading the sacred account of the whole matter, one would think that even prejudice itself could scarcely find an objection to this interpretation. Yet, says Mr. Fletcher, "Every man, possess'd of common sense, must see, that this comment is a bare-faced falsehood. The peace of the city is manifestly the subject matter of this prayer: 'Seek the peace of the city, and pray unto God for it.'—Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto Mr. Steven more than unto God, let the reader judge." ‡ But a little more patience, if you please. So far is it from being any contradiction, for one to say, "The peace of the city was the subject-matter of the prayer;" and another to say, "Their
own

* See 2 Sam. xv.—xix. † Let. p. 16. ‡ Def. p. 42.

own peace, while sojourning in the city, was solely the subject-matter of the prayer," that the two assertions are perfectly consistent; yea, the one necessarily involves the other. Their own peace, and the peace of the city, at that time, and in their peculiar circumstances, were synonymous terms. Hence the Spirit of God expressly assigns it as the formal reason, why they should pray for the peace of the city, because in the peace thereof they themselves were to have peace. Mr. Steven speaks not a word against praying for the peace of the city; but he teaches, that the command, to do so, was not given, on account of any duty of that kind, which the captives owed to the Babylonish Monarch, or the inhabitants of the city, considered as the rod of God's judgment to punish them for their sins; the alone view of it, in which the prayer can make any thing for Mr. Fletcher's purpose; but it was given, because their own peace was necessarily involved in the peace of the city. Hence a proper concern for the preservation of the church, while appearing like a bush in the midst of the flames, loudly called for this seasonable exercise.

At the foot of the same page, it is supposed, that Mr. Steven contradicts himself; because, after refusing, as is alledged, that the peace of the city was the subject-matter of the prayer, he, in the very next sentence says, that "the command to the captives was merely positive and temporary, during their seventy years residence in that place; at the expiration of which, their prayer was entirely reversed." Says Mr. Fletcher, "He cannot mean, that the prayer for their own peace was reversed, and therefore must mean their prayer for the peace of the city." The unbiaſſed reader, however, will easily discern, that there is not the least shadow of contradiction in Mr. Steven's doctrine. During the seventy years captivity, the peace of the city Babylon, and the peace of the Jews, who dwelt in it, were inseparably connected together; so that praying for the one, was, as hath just been said, praying for the other also. When that dismal period expired, and the Lord's people were brought from the place of their long captivity; the connection

was totally dissolved. Persecuting Babylon now appeared by herself, as having filled up the measure of her iniquity; as drunk with the blood of the faints; and as just about to receive blood to drink, from the hand of an avenging God. Now the captives were to reverse, not indeed the prayer for their own peace, but the temporary manner of praying for that, by seeking the peace of Babylon; which once necessarily involved the other in it, but did so no longer. It was uniformly their duty, before the captivity, during its continuance, and ever after, to seek their own peace, as the church of the living God; yea, and also to pray for repentance and reformation to all sorts of men, even the most atrociously wicked and persecuting enemies not excepted; so long as the Lord himself had not positively declared their final doom, by some direct and explicit revelation from heaven. But even this doth not say, that ever the peace of Babylon, either during the captivity, or afterwards, was sought properly on her own account, considered as the open enemy of God and religion; as holding this malicious language, concerning Jerusalem, "Raze, raze it to the foundation;" and as now solemnly devoted to destruction, by the Righteous Judge of all the earth; yea, and the awful designs of Heaven, with regard to her final ruin, already clearly made known to the church. That there may be peculiar circumstances, in which it would be improper to seek the peace of a city, or people, the God of truth himself plainly signifies; when, speaking of the polluted land and its inhabitants, he thus enjoins his ancient Israel, "Give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever." † Babylon-like, they were devoted to destruction.

The striking resemblance between Old, and New Testament Babylon, deserves our special notice here. What Mystery Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth, is to the New Testament Church;

† Ezra ix. 12. comp. Deut. xxiii. 6.

Church; the same, substantially, was ancient, persecuting Babylon to the Old Testament Church; as every one, willing to be instructed from the Book of God, may clearly see, by comparing the xiii. and xiv. chapters of Isaiah, and the l. and li. of Jeremiah, with the ii. of the 2d. Epistle to the Thessalonians, and the xvii. xviii. and part of the xix. of the Revelation.—The great characteristics of pride, haughtiness, self-sufficiency, and arrogantly assuming JEHOVAH's prerogatives, are equally applied, in both cases. The same blood-thirsty and persecuting disposition, in attempting to wear out the saints of the Most High, is ascribed to the one, and to the other. The very awful and alarming judgments of Heaven are denounced against both, in language remarkably similar. While their final ruin respectively, is, with like clearness, revealed to the church; as affording her a song of everlasting triumph. But, concerning the man of sin, or the Antichrist, in New Testament times, Mr. Fletcher says, “Some Seceders are not fond of praying for this notable blasphemer, because Paul calls him, *The Son of perdition.*” † If you, Sir, mean to rank amongst these Seceders; pray, where is your consistency, in so strenuously defending prayer for the peace and prosperity of Old Testament Antichrist, or bloody Babylon, positively declared by the Lord himself to be near unto destruction; while you scruple to pray for the peace of New Testament Antichrist, though in the very same predicament? A proper solution will be very acceptable. For my own part, I should think, that the true church of God might have been very easily excused, in earnestly praying for the destruction of the one, as well as of the other. Nor does it seem to be any thing more than a praying, agreeably to the Third Petition, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” And in unison with the cry of the souls under the altar, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” ‡ There is nothing, therefore, in the reversed prayer,

“enough

† Def. p. 75.

‡ Rev. vi. 10.

“enough to make both the ears to tingle;” as Mr. Fletcher, groundlessly, supposes. Neither has he any proper reason to say, that “ Mr. Steven mentions the following texts, Jer. li. 35. and Psal. cxxxvii. 8, 9. to prove the Antichristian doctrine of praying for curses to our enemies.” † He mentions them, Sir, to prove, that after the church hath her Lord’s will clearly made known to her, she is warranted to pray for the destruction of Antichrist, and his doctrines both. He never drops the most distant hint about praying for curses to our enemies in general; concerning whose final perdition we have no particular revelation from the Lord. But those, concerning whom he says, that the captives, instead of praying any longer for their peace, were now to pray for the vengeance of the Almighty to be inflicted on them, were plainly and positively declared, by the Spirit of truth, to be appointed for destruction. Besides, as Mr. Steven, when shewing that the prayer was to be reversed, expresses himself, in the very words of the texts adduced; it is impossible to controvert his doctrine, without controverting these texts likewise.

To weaken the force of Mr. Steven’s argument, his opponent supposes, “ Either he never knew, or has forgotten, that the vengeance of the Almighty was inflicted on Bablon, before the return of the captivity.” ‡ In proof of which position both profane and sacred history are produced. That the terrible devastations and ravages of war were experienced in Babylon, at the time, and by the instruments alluded to, and that the kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and Persians, before the Lord turned the captivity of his people, are truths, which, I suppose, were as well known to Mr. Steven, as they are to Mr Fletcher. But that these beginnings of sorrows should be any contradiction to their drinking the more full cup of indignation, a long time after, is what will not, perhaps, be so easily discerned. Mr. Fletcher himself will, probably find it too hard a task to prove, either from sacred or profane history,

† Def. p. 43.

‡ p. 44.

tery, that previous to the return of the captivity, "Babylon became heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment and an hissing without inhabitant," in accomplishment of God's threatened vengeance against her. Let the Oracles of Truth decide the controversy: "And it shall come to pass, WHEN SEVENTY YEARS ARE ACCOMPLISHED that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Caldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations."* It is worthy of notice, that the terrible desolating judgments, to be inflicted upon Babylon, are threatened in the very next verses to that which contains the reversed prayer, of which Mr. Steven speaks, and which was to be the church's amen, to the righteous vengeance of JEHOVAH's temple. † There is not, therefore, so much as the shadow of a reason, for charging him with "either never knowing, or having forgotten, that the vengeance was inflicted already." It was so only in part; but not to the extent either of the threatening, or of the prayer for its accomplishment.

But these passages, Jer. li. 35. and Psal. cxxxvii. 8, 9. says Mr. Fletcher, "are so far from proving the doctrine of this reversed prayer, that they prove it to be a mere fiction, vanity and a lie." ‡ What he intends by this, it is not easy to say. That the sense which he imposes on Mr. Steven's doctrine about reversing the prayer, turns out a mere fiction, is what, I apprehend, every judicious and candid reader will see, at the first glance of the two pamphlets. But does he mean to deny the positive and stubborn fact? Mr. Steven had said, "That at the expiration of the seventy years' captivity, the prayer for the peace of the city was entirely reversed." The Sacred Oracles, which he immediately produced, in proof of the assertion, say expressly so too: "The violence done to me, and to my flesh, be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say." Is this still to pray for the peace of the city Babylon! Must Scripture-testimony

* Jer. xxv. 12. See also Brown's Dict. on the word BABYLON.

† See Jer. li. 35,—37.

‡ Def. p. 45.

timony also be rejected; merely because it is adduced by Mr. Steven! "Let it be observed," says Mr. Fletcher, "that the passages quoted by Mr. Steven, and others of a similar nature, are to be considered rather as predictions, than as prayers." * Be it so: what is the consequence? If once the Lord be pleased to foretel what he intends to do with such and such avowed, persecuting, and irreconcilable enemies of his church; what can be the great harm in praying, Thy will be done; or in wishing that the prediction may be fulfilled? Besides, it is to be feared, that Mr. Fletcher's objection to his opponent's doctrine, will here meet himself very full in the face. "Did Mr. Fletcher never know, or has he forgotten, that the vengeance here foretold was inflicted on Babylon, before the captivity; and therefore could never be the subject matter of a prophecy?" To predict or foretel what has already happened, seems to be little less absurd, than to pray for it. While unreasonably anxious to condemn others; we are in danger of also sometimes condemning ourselves.

The precepts, prayers of the saints, example of the Great King of saints, and the doctrine of the Larger Catechism, all produced in the following pages of the Defence, † are certainly good and worthy of our serious attention. But it would be very unreasonable to suppose either Mr. Fletcher, or indeed any reader of an ordinary capacity, so very ignorant as to believe, that they militate any thing against the doctrine contained in the Letter from Crookedholm. The most of them have no respect at all to praying for magistrates as such, either of one description or another. Such of them as look that way, recommend no such thing as praying for wicked, or unlawful magistrates, in that general and unqualified form, which plainly recognizes their title; though that is evidently the matter in dispute.

In the remaining part of this section, ‡ Mr. Fletcher seems to glory over his opponent, now proselyted, as he supposes, to his own doctrine, and so come over to the camp of the Loyalist. Mr. Steven had made some concessions,

* Def. p. 45.

† p. 46,—50.

‡ p. 50,—59.

cessions, with respect to passive subjection, in cases of necessity: * Mr Fletcher replies, " Pray, Sir, how comes it to pass, that the same truth from the mouth of the Loyalist, rows into the deep sea of tyranny; but in your mouth, it looks unto the lofty mountains and little hills, that bring peace unto the people by righteousness? The solution of the difficulty in your next will be very obliging." † It hath pleased the Great Lord of life and death, who assures us, " Our days are determined, the number of our months is with him, and he hath set our bounds that we cannot pass," to call the much respected Author of the Letter from this scene of mortality into the world of spirits. Speaking after the manner of men; by his death, the church militant undoubtedly sustains a great loss; and the cause, defended in the Letter, wants an able advocate. Had it been the will of providence, to have spared him, until he should have accomplished his design of replying to Mr. Fletcher's Defence; he would certainly have found no difficulty, in solving the question before us. Even the weakest of his surviving brethren may find it a very easy matter.

If Mr. Fletcher, in producing the above examples, ‡ be pleading for no other sort of subjection to the present British Magistrates, than that which these examples recommend; Dissenters can very readily, in full consistency with their avowed principles, subscribe the doctrine. If he only mean that passive submission, particularly specified in so many words by Mr. Steven in all his concessions; wishing us, in the present case, patiently to bear such injuries as we cannot possibly avoid, till the Lord in his mercy may be pleased to grant us deliverance; to conduct ourselves peaceably; and to submit to all such things as are in their own nature innocent and lawful, but at the same time have no connection with recognizing the authority; to all this, so far as I know, Dissenters never had any objections; and all this they can easily grant, without ever shifting the ground, on which they have all along stood, and with-

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* Let. p. 113. and 128. † Def. p. 58. ‡ p. 50, &c.

out approaching one single step towards the camp of the Loyalist. The purpose for which the Loyalist produceth these examples, is, if he speak to the point at all, to prove the lawfulness of the present Government, even all circumstances considered, as the authority ordained of God; to which we owe subjection, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake. If he mean the examples to establish this; neither Mr. Steven, nor any other Dissenter who ever wrote on the subject, hath, as yet, granted that they do. If he do not mean, that they are any proof of this; all his labour on the subject, from first to last, hath been totally in vain. The grand question, about owning, or disowning, in the proper sense of the term, still remains untouched. After all that hath been said, in both the editions of the Loyalist, and in the Defence; we have only ascertained, what was never denied, namely, that seeing it was the duty of the Lord's people, when they could not help their situation, to yield passive subjection, and peaceably comply, in such things as are in themselves innocent and lawful, even under the most tyrannical and persecuting rulers, in whose dominions providence ordered their lot; much more is it their duty to yield the same sort of subjection, and comply in similar things, under milder rulers, whether their title, when all circumstances are considered, be lawful or unlawful. This is evidently the amount of the whole. And we may surely regret, that so much pains should have been taken, to persuade us of the sun's being up at noon-day.



ANIMADVERSIONS ON SECTION IV.

THE detection, of what Mr. Fletcher is pleased to call, "Misrepresentations, Calumnies and Contradictions," is the declared design of this part of the Defence. It is presumed, however, that the candid reader, upon serious examination, will find, that these terms are very ill applied. Let us see what these supposed misrepresentations are.

Mr.

Mr. Fletcher first complains, that his opponent, in almost every page of his Letter, represents the Loyalist as teaching, "That mankind should bear the yoke of slavery, even when it is in the power of their hand to throw it off." * A charge which he positively refuses. Mr. Steven indeed affirms, "That the argument from Scripture precepts and examples, AS STATED AND APPLIED BY Mr. FLETCHER, proves that men, especially the saints, must be subject to the yoke of oppression, whether they have power to throw it off or not." † And he had sufficient reason to say so. While condescending on several higher powers, to whom the Lord's people were subject, Mr. Fletcher mentions among others, "The tyrants of Egypt, of Babylon, and Rome." And then subjoins, "—If it was the duty of the people of God, in all past generations, to obey the just authority of the most froward princes, &c. ‡ Our opponent being his own interpreter, amongst the froward princes, whose just authority we should obey, tyrants have a place. But he adds, that this was to be done by the Lord's people, "When it was not in their power to break the rod of their oppressors." Be it so; he also, elsewhere, declares, "To pray for a blessing to civil rulers, and for long life and prosperity, not only to the MEEK AND GENTLE, but also to the FROWARD, is warranted by Scripture precept and example." † "The just authority of tyrants," for they are ranked among the froward princes, appears to me rather a solecism. But be that as it may: if to obey, as just and lawful, the authority of froward princes, such as, "the tyrants of Egypt, of Babylon, and Rome," and "to pray for a blessing, for long life and prosperity unto them," in their official capacity, be consistent with throwing off the yoke of their government, even though it were in our power; I confess, I cannot see it. He who resisteth the power, to whom such duties are owing, resisteth the ordinance of God; the inspired Oracles being judge. But, accord-
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* Def. p. 60. † Let. p. 128. ‡ Def. p. 50, 51.

† Scrip. Loy. p. 29.

ing to the exprefs doctrine of the Loyalift, thefe duties are owing to all froward princes in general, “the tyrants of Egypt, of Babylon, and Rome,” not excepted; therefore, he who refifteth, or cafteth off, the yoke of thefe froward princes, or tyrants, refifteth the ordinance of God. Can we both fubmit to their authority as juft, praying for a bleffing upon them in the exercife of it; and caft it off, at the fame time? If Mr. Fletcher reply; it is hoped, that he will not put us off with fome general bold affertion; but that he will plainly inform his reader, whether or not it be truly the doctrine of the Loyalift, and Defence, “that we fhould fubmit to the juft authority, and pray for a bleffing upon the government of froward princes, even fuch as the tyrants of Egypt, of Babylon, and Rome.” And then, Whether it be not a native confequence, that we cannot confiftently both do that, and caft off their authority, even though it were in our power.

A fecond mifrepresentation is faid to be, Blaming the Loyalift for “comprehending the meek and gentle, and the froward prince, within the precept and example.” “To this Mr. Fletcher replies, “It is not I, Sir, but an infpired Apoftle.”—And for proof cites 1 Pet. ii. 18. † The Apoftle, in that paffage, is evidently cautioning againft, either the absurd doctrine of fome Judaizing zealots, who foolifhly imagined, that it was inconftit with the natural rights of mankind, to be fervant to any man upon earth; or the no lefs absurd notion of thofe, who falfeiy fupposed, that the Chriftian religion diffolved the bonds of human fociety, and deftroyed the diftinction of fuperiors and inferiors, efpecially when the one party was Infidel, and the other Chriftian. To guard againft fuch miftakes, the Apoftle teaches, that Chriftianity does not diffolve the relation, already fixed; between mafter and fervant. As though he had faid, Even fuch of you as are flaves, or bond fervants, and fo have it not in your power to throw off your infidel mafters’ yoke, after you yourfelves have embraced Chriftianity, ought ftill to behave in a patient, peace-

† Def. p. 61.

peaceable and submissive manner, towards your superiors. Yea, though they should frown upon you, and use you even more roughly, on account of your religion; yet endeavour, through grace, to suffer patiently. Let not your good be evil spoken of, by giving them irritating and provoking language, or rising up in a riotous manner against them; but rather pour out your complaint unto God, who hears the sighs of the prisoners. Let the same be the study of those voluntary servants, who, previous to their embracing Christianity, had agreed with their infidel masters, to serve them for a certain length of time, upon condition of receiving certain wages, stipulated in the paction. Behave yourselves inoffensively and submissively, till your term be expired; and then you will be free to make a better choice. Thus shall you, by well-doing, put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; and wipe off the reproach, unjustly cast upon the Christian religion. Such seems to be the Apostle's scope. But what connection all this hath with praying for a blessing, for long life and prosperity, to tyrants and usurpers, for in the class of froward rulers these are allowed to be comprehended, it is, I confess, not easy to see. Because servants, whether brought into this situation by necessity, or by paction, should, during the appointed time of their servitude, peaceably do their work, and endeavour, with as much patience as possible, to bear even the frowns and maltreatment of such masters as are surly and froward in their disposition; how it will necessarily follow, that we should pray for a blessing to froward princes, or tyrants, in such form as to recognize their authority, would require to be shewn in some other manner, than by bare assertion. It is the comprehending alike, both the lawful civil ruler, and the froward prince or tyrant, within these precepts and examples, which recommend prayer of this kind, concerning which Mr. Steven complains upon the Loyalist: as any one may see, by looking into his Letter. Mr. Steven very justly considers praying, in a general and unqualified manner, for a blessing on their person and government, and for long life and pro-

prosperity to them, in their official capacity, as an owning of their authority. But having found the Loyalist obliged to confess, that lawful authority and tyranny are specifically different; he might surely, with full consistency, afterwards blame him, for putting these two on the same level, in the prayers for which he pleads.* “There were,” says Mr. Fletcher, “saints in Cesar’s household, and this precept, no doubt, bound them to be subject to their royal master in the Lord.” †. Grant it were so; to perform, by agreement, a piece of lawful work for any master, whether he be righteous or wicked, is one thing; and to pray for civil rulers, in the manner just mentioned, is another. Upon the supposition, that Cesar was one of the forward princes, or a tyrant and usurper; did the precept enjoin the saints in his household, to pray for a blessing, for long life and prosperity to him as such, or in his official capacity? If you can prove, that it did, it will be something to the purpose; but any thing else is entirely foreign to Mr. Steven’s complaint upon the Loyalist, for comprehending both the gentle, and the forward prince, within the precept and example.

Mr. Steven must be charged with another misrepresentation; because he considers the Loyalist as first fabricating this odd sense of Mat. xxii. 21. “That Cesar’s due, by the divine law, was a halter and a gallows,” and then palming it upon the Reformed Presbytery. ‡ But whether this be a misrepresentation, or a well-grounded complaint, we shall see immediately. The Presbytery say, “That by looking into the divine law, the Jews might see that Cesar had a just title to all that was due to an usurper, idolater and murderer.” || Mr. Fletcher says, “According to them, the sense of this text is, Render therefore unto Cesar a halter and a gallows; which is a forbidding to give tribute to Cesar with a witness.” † Says Mr. Steven, “If the sense of our Lord’s words, which you mention, is a very odd sense, it is altogether your own; and why should you palm
your

* See Let. p. 13,—15. † Def. p. 61. ‡ *ibid.*

|| Test. p. 150. 3d. Edit. † Loy. p. 13.

your own oddities upon the Reformed Presbytery? It is self-evident to every judicious mind, that the Presbytery, in your quotation, is not speaking of our Lord's words concerning tribute at all, but of the divine law as distinct from them, and given hundreds of years before our Lord's incarnation; by looking into which, and without asking him, they could have known what was Cesar's due." † After giving this fair statement of the matter, in the very words of the several authors; it would be insulting the understanding of the judicious reader, to occupy his time, in proving the justness of Mr. Steven's complaint. But says Mr. Fletcher, in his own defence, "If Cesar's due was that of a murderer, he certainly deserved a halter, or some other instrument of death." ‡ Be it so: teaching in so many words, even supposing the Presbytery had done so, that death was Cesar's due, according to the divine law, is a very different thing from saying, that our Lord, in his reply to the captious question, actually specified the verdict of the law, and told the Jews, that it was THEIR DUTY, to put Cesar to death, by some means or other. The Presbytery, or any other teachers in Israel, might safely say, that death, according to the law of Moses, was due to the woman taken in adultery. But it would be something very different, and not quite so consistent with the truth, to say, that our Lord, in his reply to those who interrogated him on the subject, actually specified this verdict of the Mosaic law, and authorized them to put her to death. The misrepresentation, therefore, is evidently on our opponent's side. But, after all, what can Mr. Fletcher mean, by questioning this doctrine of the Reformed Presbytery, "That Cesar had a just title unto all that was due to an usurper, idolater and murderer?" Rather than drop the quarrel, will he rise up in opposition to the most stubborn, and well-authenticated facts? Will he contradict the very Oracles of Heaven? If good history can be sustained, as the voucher of any fact; unquestionably Cesar bore the characters, which are here given him. And if the Bible

be

† Let. p. 97.

‡ Def. p. 62.

be true; it is a divine law, no less unquestionable, "Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." † Must the purple, the crown, and the sceptre be considered as exempting the criminal, from being obnoxious to the execution of the divine law!

Representing the Loyalist as teaching, "That Christ sinned in paying tribute to the temple," is charged as another of Mr. Steven's misrepresentations. In opposition to which Mr. Fletcher replies, "The Loyalist never said, that Christ sinned, in paying tribute either to Cesar or to the temple; and therefore it is not his, but your own doctrine." ‡ I firmly believe, that it was never the doctrine, neither of Mr. Fletcher nor of Mr. Steven, that ever Christ, who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, could possibly sin, either in one instance or another. And it is matter of regret, that ever an idea so very indelicate and shocking should be suggested. Mr. Steven, in the place quoted, considers it as undeniably evident, that the tribute, paid at Capernaum, was sacred and not civil tribute; a position which his opponent does not indeed venture to refuse. He views it as no less evident, that our Saviour actually paid it to the sacred purpose, for which it was originally intended by the divine law. And therefore Mr. Fletcher's insinuating, "That it was no less sinful to pay tribute, for supporting a church, that was wallowing in the mire of error and immorality, than to pay it for supporting a Pagan civil government," he considers, if we apply it to the case before us, as having a tendency to "Entangle the Lord of Glory in a sinful dilemma;" in as much as he must have paid it for one or other of these purposes. Whether or not the complaint be just, the impartial reader may judge. But if Mr. Fletcher be truly persuaded, that there could be no harm in the simple payment of tribute, for the support, either of a Pagan civil government, or of a corrupt church; how is it that he frequently charges Dissenters with contradicting their profession by their practice,

while

† Gen. ix. 6.

‡ Def. p. 63.

while they bear, and groan under, the common public burdens, imposed upon the nation?

The candid reader will certainly be not a little surprised, to find it also, in the same page, put to the score of misrepresentation, for Mr. Steven to say, concerning the rulers, or rather tyrants of Babylon, "That their government, instead of being a blessing to the captives, was, from beginning to end, a scene of violence, tyranny and oppression." A truth which, I apprehend, was scarcely ever called in question before. The very names, Persecutors, Adversaries, Enemies and Spoilers of God's people, † with others of the same kind, whereby the Spirit of truth characterises them, plainly signify so much. These, surely, are not empty sounds, unmeaning epithets. Besides, the nature and design of the captivity itself, proclaim the doctrine. Both suffering Israel, and the God of Israel, viewed it in the light of a grievous punishment; inflicted on account of sin, and through the instrumentality of the Babylonish despots; who were the tremendous rod of JEHOVAH's anger, and the terrible staff of his indignation, to scourge and chastise a guilty people. In order to accomplish the awful designs of an offended God, it was requisite that the Babylonians should be permitted to exercise their cruelties; till such time as he might be pleased to turn away his anger and his fury from Jerusalem the holy city; and make the cup of his wrath to pass over unto Babylon, in her turn. In exhibiting to our view this scene of violence and proud scorn, the beloved Daniel, nigh the close of the captivity, has this expressive language, "The curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses.—God hath confirmed his words which he spake against us, by bringing upon us a great evil.—For our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us." ‡ By this it appears to have been the iron rod of oppression, under which they had been groaning, even until the end of the seventy years.

† Lam. i. Psal. cxxxvii. 3.

‡ Dan. ix. 11,—16.

years. "But there might be, at times, a comparative easing of their captivity, or some instances of mitigation." Be it so; one or two small exceptions were never considered as destroying the force of a general rule; otherwise, the Scripture itself would oftentimes be exceptionable: That the Lord, according to the true scope and spirit of the passages cited in the Defence, * made his people to be pitied of all those who carried them captive; when, having accomplished his holy designs upon them in Babylon, he gathered them from among the Heathen, and returned their captivity, as streams of water in the South, was never denied; nor doth it, in the least, militate against Mr. Steven's assertion. But says Mr. Fletcher, "The Israel of God would have been cut off from being a nation, if the government of the Babylonians had, from beginning to end, been a scene of violence, tyranny and oppression." † An assertion rather too rash, I apprehend. Concerning the sons of Jacob, in the house of bondage, the divine testimony is, That their cruel lords should "afflict them four hundred years." ‡ Or, according to the spirit of the nervous original, should hear and answer their complaints, under their grievous oppression, by heavy strokes, or severe corrections. If ever a scene of violence, tyranny and oppression was opened in the world, it was certainly in the land of Egypt. But was the Israel of God, even under this persecution, continued for a much longer space than seventy years, cut off from being a nation? No; "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." It was the same church, or people of God, collectively considered, who were the sufferers in Egypt, and in Babylon. It was the same God of Jesurun, who watched over them, in both places, and preserved them from utter destruction; even in the midst of the furnace. While his hand was not shortened, that it could not save, nor his ear heavy, that it could not hear; there was no need to suppose, that even violence,

tyranny

* p. 64.

† *ibid.*

‡ Gen. xv. 13.

tyranny and oppression, could cut off his people from being a nation. Were it impossible for a people, collectively considered, to exist, during the space of seventy years, even amidst a scene of violence and oppression; we must have heard of many more annihilations, under the arbitrary, despotic, and tyrannical governments, that have been in the world. The same reasoning will apply to the following paragraph in the Defence, concerning the Roman Emperors. Though there might be a few exceptions; their government, in general, was certainly oppressive and tyrannical. Others besides Dissenters have thought so, "The emperors were generally monsters, abandoned to every vice of which human nature is capable. They tyrannized over their subjects in such a manner, that the soldiers, who ought to have been the servants of the state, became its masters; and instead of protecting and defending the empire from the barbarous nations around it, fought only to enrich themselves by its spoils." † And, by the by, there is no such expression, neither in the quoted page, nor in any other part of Mr. Steven's Letter as this, that "All the Roman Emperors were a rabble of monsters, without excepting any one of them." The express words are, "—Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and the rabble of the succeeding monsters." ‡ That is, if we allow the words a fair construction, all the rest, of the same description, who came after them. A mode of expression, which might safely be used, even supposing there had been an equal number of a different character. Whether "Algernon Sidney," from whom the quotation is taken, "was, according to Mr. Steven, a learned gentleman; or, according to others, a learned Devil," doth not at all affect the merits of the cause. Perhaps it is possible for the same person to be both these. Only one thing is noticeable, that if an author be produced, on the side of Dissenters; we may always expect him to be stigmatized with some mark of reproach or other. I shall not, at present, litigate the matter, with respect

to

† New Edin. Geogr. Vol. I. p. 78.

‡ Let. p. 37.

to the author in question. A few of his own words, however, may be quoted. Speaking of the Israelites as not being obliged to have any king; and teaching, that they could not, without a crime, have any but one, who must not raise his heart above the rest of them; he says, "This was taught by Moses: And Samuel, who spake by the same Spirit, could not contradict him." † Whether it be the manner of the Deist, to consider holy men of God, living in distant periods, both speaking as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and having their pens infallibly guided by the wisdom which cometh from above; the reader may judge. Meanwhile, might we be allowed to ask Mr. Fletcher, what hath become of his charity, which thinketh no evil; especially concerning those who are no more, to answer for themselves?

Our attention is next turned to "Manifest contradictions." Mr. Fletcher considers much of his opponent's Letter as consisting of these; and is tempted to think that it was written by several persons, not of one mind; and put to the press by one as destitute of ability, as any of them. ‡ Whether he says so, on the footing of any surmises, which he may have heard to that purpose; or if the idea natively rose in his own mind, on reviewing the contents of the Letter; it is not my province to say. But as to the fact; he may be informed, that the Letter is entirely the production of the Author, whose name it bears. I hope, I may venture to add, that any person, destitute of prejudice, and possessing a very moderate share of discernment, with respect to the peculiarities of style and mode of expression, may easily perceive, even at first glance, that it is wholly of a piece; and that the Author's manner pervades every sentence of it. Let us attend to the supposed contradictions.

Concerning the much litigated text, Mat. xxii. 21. Mr. Steven had said, "Christ, in general, teaches to
give

† Disc. on Gov. Chap. III. Sect. 3. p. 264. Fol. Edit.

‡ Def. p. 65.

give Cesar all things, that by the law of God were due to him."—And, in the same page, adds, "The Reformed Presbytery justly deny, that Christ, in his answer to the spies, stated either Cesar's due, or God's due." †—"You will easily see, Sir," says Mr. Fletcher, "that these sayings, like the legs of the lame, are not equal." ‡ We do very easily see, Sir, that they are not equal. We find it also very easy, and very just, to observe, that he must see very ill indeed, who would either mean or suppose them to be equal. The one is a general, and the other a particular proposition. But there are many things which are not equal; and, at the same time, are not contradictory. A minister's instructing his people, to do justly, in all things in general, and give every one his own, is not equal to his particularly specifying, in certain given cases, what really is every one's own. Yet the one of these he may do; and, for the time, leave the other undone, without the least shadow of contradiction. And he who gives a narrative of his procedure, in such a case, might, with perfect consistency, say, He taught in general, that we should give every one his own; but, for reasons which he could easily assign, he did not think it necessary, at that time, particularly to specify, neither what was his own, nor what was our own; but left us to learn these from other sources of information, to which we had ready access, and with which we professed to be well acquainted. Thus might the narrator of the fact, in the very same sentence, or, as Mr. Steven, in the same page, positively affirm one thing, and deny another, without the smallest contradiction. Were he both to affirm and deny the same thing; the matter, indeed, would be very different. If Mr. Fletcher refuse this doctrine, in the case before us; it must be at the expense of involving himself, inextricably, in the snare, with respect to the other branch of the text. That our Saviour, in his answer, expressly taught, in general, that they were to give God whatever was his due, is

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† Let. p. 96.

‡ Def. p. 65.

as plain as words can make it. And that he did not, in his answer, at that time, specify what was God's due, is every whit as plain. "Are these sayings, like the legs of the lame, not equal?" Must they also rank in the class of "manifest contradictions?"

It is also considered as a contradiction, first to "assert that magistracy is an ordinance of God as Creator;" and then to say, "There is not the remotest hint in Scripture of any other power or dominion exercised, in the kingdom either of providence or of grace, but that which is delegated to Christ." Here Mr. Fletcher declares, "The last of these sayings gives the lie to the first." † But it is equally easy both to say and to prove, that the last of these is perfectly consistent with the first; yea, and consistent too with the rational modes of thinking and speaking amongst men, not inferior in discernment and accuracy, either to Seceders or Dissenters. The mere delegation of a power, with respect to the more immediate exercise of it, in order to accomplish some important end, whether it be versant about the appointing of magistrates, or any thing else, was never, I apprehend, considered, by any sensible writers on government in general, as the destruction or swallowing up of that power, in respect of the original possessor. Had this been the case; we should not have heard of deputed rulers; or of a viceroy, managing the whole affairs of a kingdom, over which he is set by his lord and master; who is still, notwithstanding the delegation of his power, as to the present exercise of it, to be considered and acknowledged as the rightful sovereign of that kingdom. Mr. Fletcher, it is hoped, will not refuse, that God, as Creator and Great Moral Governor, is the Righteous Judge of all the earth; yea, and that this is an essential right or power, of which it is absolutely impossible he can ever be divested. Neither will he refuse, that "The Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment to the Son.—And given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the

† Def. p. 66.

the Son of man." † The extent of the power is abundantly plain. The holy management and righteous control, given, or delegated, to the Mediator, extend to heaven, earth, and hell. ‡ "Do you really think, Sir, that the essential judging-power of the Three-One-God, is swallowed up in Christ's mediatorial power of judging the quick and the dead?" One who wishes to dismiss the argument, without ever touching it, may very likely object, "you have compared the King of kings to earthly rulers, and their deputies." We have done no such thing. But we have shewn, that the consistency of delegating power, as to the present exercise of it, without destroying it in the original possessor, may be argued from cases amongst men. In other respects, there may be some, or there may be no comparison; notwithstanding any thing we have said. It may still be objected, "Those things are affirmed of Christ, not as Mediator, but as God equal with the Father." But if this be supposed to relieve from one absurdity; it leads into another, inconceivably greater. To speak of COMMITTING or GIVING to Christ, any power or authority, simply considered as God; would be very incongruous indeed! In that capacity he is absolutely incapable of any such gift; being naturally, eternally and necessarily possessed of all power, in common with the other adored persons of the Trinity. Unwilling to be convinced by any means, some may even yet object, and say, "That the ruling, controlling, and judging power, ascribed to Christ, as Mediator, is confined to the church alone, and doth not extend to any other part of JEHOVAH'S dominions." The Scriptures cited fully prove the contrary. Besides, even supposing it were the case; it would be no salvo. Hath not the Three-One-God an essential power of ruling and judging his worshippers? But if the delegation of the power, be equivalent to the destruction, or swallowing of it up, in respect of the original possessor; the absurdity will be much the same, whe-

† John v. 22. 27.

‡ Mat. xxviii. 18. 1 Cor. xv. 27. 1 Pet. iii. 22. Rev. i. 18,

whether this be the case, only in a part, or in the whole of the dominions. † The doctrine of the quotation from Mr. Boston, Dissenters firmly believe, and uniformly teach; and that in full consistency with all that either Mr. Steven, or any of his brethren, ever said.

Mr. Fletcher likewise finds a contradiction between saying, That magistracy is not a gospel ordinance; and yet teaching, That it is instituted in the Word. Mr. Steven had refused, that either the Reformed Presbytery, or any of their followers, ever taught that magistracy was a gospel-ordinance; and supposed, that the man who would make such an inference behaved to expose either his own ignorance or dishonesty. “The Loyalist, Sir,” says Mr. Fletcher, “will venture to make the inference, and yourself being judge, will neither expose his ignorance nor dishonesty. The Reformed Presbytery have taught, that God Almighty—hath instituted, in HIS WORD, the office and ordinance of civil government. Now, Sir, if the ordinance of civil government be instituted in the Word, the inference is inevitable, That Magistracy is as much a gospel-ordinance, as preaching the Word and baptism, &c. for gospel-ordinances are to be found, not in the Book of Nature, but in the Volume of Revelation.” ‡ I should be very sorry, indeed, to admit the thought, that Mr. Fletcher is either ignorant, or dishonest in his intentions. But there is no saying into what absurdities the heat of dispute will precipitate some men. Because gospel-ordinances are to be found only in the Sacred Volume; how it will follow, that therefore all other things, which are found there, must also be gospel-ordinances, very few, I presume, will ever be able to see. The fallacy of the reasoning, and its striking resemblance to the productions of ignorance, are so very evident, that he may run who reads them. The argument proceeds wholly upon the very chimerical supposition, that there is nothing other to be found in the Word, besides gospel ordinances.

Could

† See Henry on Psal. xcvii. 1. And on Psal. xcix. 1.

‡ Def. p. 67.

Could this be once established; the rest would, indeed, follow of course. The argument would stand fair; and might be thus expressed: There is nothing other to be found in the Word, besides gospel-ordinances: but magistracy is to be found in the Word; therefore magistracy is a gospel ordinance. Here, however, the first proposition is evidently false; and therefore the last, being the conclusion natively drawn from it, must be of the same description. In the written Word we find the institution of marriage, genealogies, histories, judicial laws, relative-duties, &c. Are these as much gospel-ordinances as preaching the Word and baptism? We shall, likely, be told, Though these things be found in the Word; they are not instituted in it. Marriage, however, is certainly instituted there, in so many words. † But let us not quarrel about sound; if the substance be granted. Neither let us shelter ourselves, as Mr. Fletcher frequently doth, under the covert of doubtful and unexplained terms. When we assert, that magistracy is instituted in the Word; our meaning is plainly this, That JEHOVAH, the Great Moral Governor of the universe, hath, by his Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, made it clearly known, as his will unto his people, that there should be civil government amongst them; prescribed the qualifications of the ruler; expressly declared, what are the important ends of his office; and given general rules, for directing his conduct, in his official capacity. ‡ Whoever, then, means to do the argument justice; must either say so too; or positively deny, and assign his reasons.

Adopting the sentiments of his brother, the author of "The Presbyterian Covenanter displayed," Mr. Fletcher considers the doctrine, That magistracy is appointed in the written Word, as "pregnant with absurdities.—Erasianism in the abstract.—Grossly Popish.—And necessarily leading to this conclusion, That the Heathen world

† Gen. ii. 24. comp. Mat. xix. 5, 6. and Eph. v. 31.

‡ Deut. xvi. 18. with Rom. xiii. 1.—2 Sam. xxiii. 3.—

Rom. xiii. 3, 4.—Deut. xvii. 14,—20.

world can have no magistrates, nor ever could; because they wanted divine revelation: So that this principle at once cuts off the far greater part of the world from a possibility of having magistrates." † That the most precious doctrines in the Bible are capable of being abused, by wicked and unreasonable men, to favour the absurdities of Erastianism, Popery, and what-not; was never questioned by us. But this is no proof, that they have any bad tendency, in themselves. To give the objection all its force, let us suppose, though it is no doctrine of ours, that magistracy flows from Christ as Mediator, and that he hath appointed the civil magistrate, as well as the gospel minister; still it is difficult to see, how it follows, that the one must necessarily step into the other's place; while the offices are perfectly distinct in themselves. Upon the same principle, we behoved to conclude, that because the Deacon and the Pastor are both appointed by the same Head of the church therefore the duties of their respective offices must be blended together. It is true, the blending of two ecclesiastic offices, is one thing; and the blending of a civil and an ecclesiastic office, is another. The one, however, is inconsistent and absurd, as well as the other. But as the doctrine, That magistracy flows from Christ as Mediator, is none of ours; and as we have ever been strenuous opposers of Erastianism, viewing that as one of the principal errors against which our Testimony is pointed; we are not accountable for the consequences, neither of the one, nor of the other. To teach, that Christ, as Mediator, hath a delegated power, to manage, direct and over-rule magistracy, in subserviency to the interests of his church, is a very different thing from teaching, that the ordinance itself originally flows from him, in the same capacity, as the fountain of magistratical power. The former we hold; the latter we positively refuse.

“ If magistracy is instituted in the word,” says our opponent, “ then the Heathen world can have no magistrates.”

† Def. p. 68.

strates." But how the one of these necessarily follows from the other, it is not easy to discern. Cannot the same things, sometimes, be found, both in the law of nature, and in the written Word? Though the Heathen cannot have any clear, full, or adequate understanding of either religious or civil institutions, wanting the light of divine revelation; may they not have some obscure and imperfect knowledge of both? Because we find religious worship instituted in the Word; must we, therefore, conclude, that the Heathen can have no sort of religious worship amongst them? No, indeed. The invisible things of God, from the beginning, are so made known by the things which are made, that they are said to be without excuse, for their idolatrous worship. We find many volumes written on natural religion. But it will be said, "Their religious worship is very imperfect." It is certainly true. And their civil government must be so also; while wanting the unerring standard, to direct them. Marriage, as we have just seen, is instituted in the Word; can the Heathen world, therefore, have no marriage amongst them? Relative duties are very fully, and clearly, prescribed in the Holy Scriptures; does this say, that the Heathen can have no understanding of the duties, which the parent owes to his child, or the master to his servant? They who have read the practical works of Cicero, Seneca, and other moral writers among them, will soon see the contrary. I have often been made to wonder, what our Seceding Brethren could discern, so remarkably peculiar and odd, about civil government; that they always consider the light of nature as sufficient to direct men, with respect to the proper requisites of it; while they never speak of this being the case, with respect to any thing else, which concerns the moral conduct of men. To me it appears, that such a distinction is very ill founded. The true state of the matter seems rather to be, That although the Heathen, without the aid of the Inspired Oracles, may have some confused notions of both civil and religious duties; yet, labouring under this disadvantage, they cannot have proper, con-

sistent, nor adequate ideas of either. Some of the things, which they do, may, materially considered, be good and commendable; yet their conduct in general, formally considered, as clothed with all its circumstances, and viewed in the light of Divine Revelation, must be exceedingly defective. Mr. Fletcher declares, it is very absurd to teach, that magistracy is instituted in the Scripture. But it is surely much more absurd, to teach, that it is not instituted there. If not in the Scripture; where is it instituted at all? He will reply, "In the law of nature."—Important discovery! The law of nature, it seems, is more full and extensive than the law of the Scripture, comprehending at least one institution, which is not to be found in all the Bible. And that too, a very precious and interesting institution; which, from the very nature and design of it, necessarily embraces, in one shape or other, the whole duties contained in, what is ordinarily called, the second table of the moral law.

To prevent mistakes, and throw additional light on this part of the subject, I beg leave to offer a few remarks, concerning the divine law, by which the faith and practice of men should ever be regulated. By a law, in general, we understand, The righteous will of a lawful sovereign; made known to his subjects, by some means or other, as the regulating standard of their conduct. JEHOVAH, being the Great Sovereign of heaven and earth; his will, made known to his reasonable creatures, must be the universal law, by which they are all bound. Hence it is plain, that the moral law, substantially considered, being only a transcript of his moral image, must be absolutely unalterable; though its particular precepts are to be actually applied, agreeably to the diversified situations, in which mankind may be placed. Yea, even a positive, or ceremonial law, cannot be altered, except by him, who is the Author of it. And therefore, till he signify his pleasure, concerning its abolition, it must bind the conscience of the moral agent, as inviolably as the other. Thus it would appear, that the term, LAW OF NATURE, rather denotes

denotes the particular mode of revelation; than any specific difference in the law itself. Still the will of God, through whatever medium it be made known, must be considered as the rule of duty. In man's state of primitive integrity, the will of God was written, in very legible characters, on the fleshly tables of his heart; inasmuch as he was created after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. This good and acceptable will of God, thus made known, might properly be called the moral law, in respect of its perpetual and inviolable obligation. But it might be called the law of nature, in respect of the manner, in which it was revealed; man having a clear discovery of it, by the unerring dictates of his understanding and conscience; agreeably to the perfect rectitude of his holy nature. Ever since the fall, depravity hath pervaded all the faculties of the soul; consequently, the eye, by which the law should be discerned and read, hath now become dim. There seem, however, still to remain some impressions of right and wrong; or, in other words, some obscure intimations of JEHOVAH'S will, by the dictates of natural reason, and by the conscience accusing, or excusing. But if we call these dictates the law of nature; it is evident, that we use the term in a loose and improper sense, for the medium, through which the law is, partly made known. The dictates of any man's judgment or conscience, even supposing them to be right, and supposing you mean them to be only a subordinate standard; yet can be a law only to himself; but to no other; unless you allow one to be the lord of another's conscience: which would be an encroachment on the divine prerogative. Besides, these dictates are so exceedingly diversified, and contradictory, at different times, and in different men; that they can never possibly be any proper and consistent law to the whole species; neither in one capacity, nor another. The great primary law, therefore, or first original standard, by which all human societies, whether civil or religious, should ever be careful to regulate their conduct, must still be the will of God; revealed

unto them, in some form or other. But the Holy Scriptures are, unquestionably, the fullest and fairest copy of this revelation, that ever was enjoyed, by fallen man; therefore, the ordinance of magistracy, if to be found any-where, must certainly be found in them. If any chuse to call the will of God, the law of nature, on account of its being partly made known by the works of creation and providence; still we are brought to the same conclusion. The law is always the same. The difference lies only in the medium of discerning it. And however full the intimations, through this medium, may be; they cannot be, substantially, different from those contained in the Scriptures; nor is it possible, that they can be so complete. "The heavens," indeed, "declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." But still the Volume of Inspiration, more completely, serves, "For doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Those respecting his conduct in civil society not excepted.

After all, it is truly astonishing, that one, who gives the title of SCRIPTURE LOYALIST, to his performance; and complains upon his opponents for "supporting their political principles so much by Acts of Parliament, and so little," as he supposes, "by the Word of God;" † should be so exceedingly averse to this doctrine, That magistracy is instituted in the Word. To consider the Bible as directing our subjection to an institution, which is not to be found, from beginning to end of it, must certainly appear rather strange.

But says Mr. Fletcher, "If magistracy is a gospel-ordinance, whence is it, that the Reformed Presbytery, and their followers, have never observed it?" ‡ Answer, If once they think it necessary to teach the doctrine; they will, probably, attend to its native consequences. As yet, they have nothing to do, either with the one or the other.

Addressing

† Loy. p. 76.

‡ Def. p. 69.

Addressing himself to his opponent, he says, "Not a few pages of your Letter are tarnished with the sin of slander, by which the empire of Satan was erected, and is preserved among mankind."* And, for instances of this, quotes the 71st. 124th. and 127th. pages. The inferences drawn, or things alledged, in these pages of the Letter, are confirmed by fair citations from the Seceders' Defence of their principles, and from the Loyalist himself; together with other reasons, which are assigned, and to which Mr. Fletcher hath thought it proper to make no reply. While, therefore, he, and his associates, chuse to call them, "Downright calumnies;" we are at equal liberty, to call them, Downright truths; until the reasons assigned be disproved.

The Section concludes by asserting, that "This proverb, *Physician, heal thyself*, is applicable to many Masters, in our degenerate Israel." † Of that we entertain no doubt: and, by this time, the judicious reader will, easily, see, that the Loyalist may fairly rank in the honourable list.



ANIMADVERSIONS ON SECTION V.

THIS SECTION is said to "Contain a Defence of the public prayers of Seceders for the King, and for all that are in authority." ‡

After what hath been already advanced, on this part of the subject, § it would be improper, to trespass much farther on the reader's patience. A few additional remarks, therefore, shall here suffice. The prayers defended by Mr. Fletcher, are thus expressed, "That God may bless our sovereign King George, and the apparent heir of the crown:—that he may be gracious to the high courts of parliament, in this and the neighbouring island, and lead them to proper measures for the

* Def. p. 69. † p. 71. ‡ *ibid.* § See above, p. 77,—82.

the honour of Christ." * The question, then, at issue, is precisely this, Whether these prayers, as thus expressed, whatever may be the private sentiments of the supplicant, do not, according to the usual import of language, necessarily involve an approbation of the constitution; by which the throne is supported, and upon the footing of which alone it is, that the King was ever clothed with any of his royal epithets? There is not, surely, any King of Britain, at present, either in civil, or in any other things, either to wear the crown, sway the sceptre, or convene the high courts of parliament, but upon the footing of the complex constitution. If it should be accounted weakness; Dissenters are indeed so weak, as to think, that all such general and unqualified prayers necessarily imply an approbation of the constitution, which provides for the stability of the throne; and are, substantially, the same with a formal oath of allegiance to the sovereign. Nor are they alone, in this opinion; Mr. Fletcher himself grants, that "Praying for magistrates is an act of subjection to them." † He certainly means, praying in such manner as he and his Brethren do. He intends, likewise, I suppose, such subjection, as recognizes the magistrate's title; otherwise, he rather weakens, than strengthens his own cause. Besides, one of his Brethren, who holds the high rank of Professor, and who must know the conduct of the rest, with respect to this matter, hath positively declared, that "All the ministers in the Secession, every Lord's day, give the greatest proof that they can give of their loyalty to the supreme magistrate. They pray for the stability of his throne, and the prosperity of his government.—Should they swear allegiance to government every week, in the presence of many hundred witnesses, could they give a better proof of their loyalty?" ‡ The mode of expression necessarily implies, that they could not. A free confession, with respect to the import of the general prayer. Perhaps we shall be told, "That, even supposing
Seceders

* Loy. p. 28. † p. 16. ‡ Confid. on Overt. p. 34.

Seceders were actually to swear the oath of allegiance; this doth not involve an approbation of the complex constitution." Seceders shall be allowed to be their own expositors. "The question is not," say they, "whether it be lawful for us to swear the present allegiance to the civil government, which the Presbytery acknowledge they cannot do; seeing there are no oaths to the government, in being, but what exclude the oath of our Covenants, or homologate the united constitution." † Thus we find, that the general prayers of Seceders, themselves being the judges, are equivalent to an oath of allegiance; and, at the same time, that the oath of allegiance homologates the united constitution: whether it be a just inference, that these prayers must, therefore, in like manner, homologate the united constitution, and are inconsistent with the removal of its essential parts, shall be freely submitted, to the judicious reader's determination. Meanwhile, Mr. Fletcher, if he chuse, may certainly see, that the inconsistency, or hypocrisy, of which his opponent complains, doth not lye between the thoughts of the heart, and the words of the mouth, for concerning the former Mr. Steven never made the smallest pretention to judge; but it lies between the unqualified and general prayers, as given by themselves, involving an approbation of the constitution; and those parts of their Testimony, in which they refuse the propriety of taking the oaths, and in which they testify against many fundamental evils in that constitution, which, according to themselves, these oaths homologate. There is not, therefore, the least occasion, to think, or speak, of occupying the heart-searching JEHOVAH's prerogative, in pointing out the inconsistency, or hypocrisy of these things. But Mr. Fletcher finds a very strange evasion. "Seceders," says he, "are not ashamed to approve of the monarchical form of the British Government, nor do they scruple to pray for the continuance of it." ‡ I hope he doth not mean, to get into the strong hold of "Monarchical Government

† Declar. of Prin. p. 55.

‡ Def. p. 72.

vernment in the abstract," without considering the complex constitution, as it actually exists. Dissenters too can approve of a mixed monarchy, as a very good kind of government, in general. The Martyrs, in the reign of James VII. could very easily have approved the bare monarchical form of the government; tho' they could not approve the monarchical government; as it was then actually framed, and administered. All this, is a very different thing from the approving of the constitution, at large, as comprehending so many fundamental laws, and conditions of rule; and different from praying, in loose terms, for a blessing on the high courts of parliament; in one of which Diocesan Bishops are a constituent, an essential part, without whom, there is no such court existing in Britain, neither to be approved, nor condemned.

Mr. Steven had said, that if Seceders' prayers for government had been heard at all, it seemed to have been in the sense of the objectors; for the evils of the constitution still continued. Immediately Mr. Fletcher exclaims, "Fine reasoning indeed! An Erastian constitution continues, therefore Seceders have been praying for the continuance, of it." † No, Sir, that hath not the least shadow of connection with the reasoning, in the quotation. The thing, inferred by Mr. Steven, is not, that Seceders must have been praying for this, or the other thing; but the sense or view, in which the prayers, actually presented in the language specified, must have been heard; if they were heard at all. While Seceders had prayed, for the continuance, and prosperity of the government, in general; the question, between them and us, was, Is that prayer consistent with the removal of the evils, in the constitution; or does it necessarily imply a continuance of these evils, along with the constitution, of which they are an essential part? Seceders maintain the former; Dissenters the latter. Now, it is not said, whether the prayer had been actually heard and answered, or not. But if we suppose
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† Def. p. 73.

it to have been heard at all; then, says Mr. Steven, we must surely conclude, that it hath been in the latter sense; in as much as the stubborn fact is, that the evils still continue; along with the constitution, for the stability of which Seceders pray. This is, evidently, the reasoning of the quotation, from Mr. Seven's Letter. And it is so very plain, that there can be no proper excuse, for our opponent's unaccountable misrepresentation of it.

As to the quotation, in the next paragraph of the Defence, concerning separating between the bad man, and his badness; if the reader chuse to look into the 24th and 25th pages of the Letter; he will readily perceive, that what Mr. Steven is properly arguing against, is praying, in loose and general terms, for a blessing, long life, and prosperity to false teachers, or wicked and unlawful rulers, as such, in their official capacity; and when you have done so, pretending, that you only meant to express your concern, for the pardon of their sins, redemption of their souls, and bodily health, considering them simply as men, and sinners of the human race. He also objects to the separating between the ruler, and the constitution, on the footing of which he holds and exercises his power, the principles on which the constitution is founded, and the articles of which it is composed. Separating between these, as you pretend to do between the bad man, and his badness, he indeed considers as a whimsical deceit. And many more, I apprehend, will be found to be of the same opinion. Were Mr. Fletcher to try an experiment on the common sentiments of mankind; I am afraid, that the result would be rather unfavourable. Should he venture, in some public company, where the crown-lawyers are present, openly to express his wish, for the health, happiness, long life and prosperity of the French Directory; it is highly probable, that disagreeable experience might soon teach him, in what light mankind, ordinarily, understand such public and solemn wishes. Yet the constituent members of the Directory, even supposing the worst of it, can only be bad men;

unto whom we may certainly pray for grace and repentance.

Mr. Steven is next told, That if he know any secret plots against the British government; he should discover them. † But as he speaks not a word about knowing any, in the place quoted, but only recommends it to those, who profess such a zealous attachment to the government, to inquire, if there be any; we have, as yet, no concern with the discovery. As to the complaint, about the hypocrisy of the Seceders' prayers, it hath been spoken to already.

Strongly reprobating the Reformed Presbytery's mode of prayer, and giving loose reins to the most bitter invective, Mr. Fletcher says, "Your praying for grace to your fellow-men of all ranks, and your praying for the vengeance of the Almighty to be inflicted upon your persecutors to the uttermost, is a very contradictory way of praying." ‡ But Mr. Steven never said, that he prayed for the vengeance of the Almighty, on his persecutors. He told, as warranted by the express words of the Holy Spirit, that the captives in Babylon, in their peculiar circumstances, having a direct revelation from heaven, concerning those, who were, at once, the avowed and irreconcilable enemies of God, and of his church, were to pray for the vengeance of the Almighty, or the execution of his righteous judgments, upon the **BABYLONIANS**. Which was, substantially, the same with saying, "True and righteous are his judgments." In such prayers, we do not consider the objects of the vengeance, simply as fellow-men, nor even as ordinary sinners, having space for repentance; but we consider them, formally, as God's avowed and impenitent enemies, devoted to destruction. In this view of them, I should expect, that Mr. Fletcher himself would sometimes pray, for the vengeance of the Almighty to be inflicted on mystical Babylon, or the New Testament Antichrist. Yet the poor infatuated mortal, who bears the name of Antichrist, is certainly one of our fellow-men,

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† Def. p. 74.

‡ p. 75.

a descendant of Adam, as well as we. Whatever might become of his person, were his kingdom and interest effectually destroyed; the church's prayers, for his down-fall, would be sufficiently answered. Our opponent goes on; "You pray for grace to all who wear crowns, and, no doubt, for grace to the Pope, who wears a triple crown of blasphemies."—To this I make no reply!—It is sufficient to observe, that it drops from the pen of a "Seceder, who fears God, and who will not render evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing." A very odd way of blessing, to be sure!

In the following page, it is supposed, that the prayers of Seceders, and the prayers of Dissenters are substantially the same; in as much as Mr. Steven had granted, "that he pled for grace to his fellow-men of all ranks and degrees, high or low, prince or peasant." "In this prayer," says Mr Fletcher, "there are no more exceptions of evils, about the King, and the constitution, than in the prayers of Seceders." Be it so: but is there any thing, in the prayer, inconsistent with the removal of such evils; or any thing, which, according to the usual import of language, necessarily implies their continuance; as we have already found to be the case, in the public prayers of Seceders? I should rather suppose not.



ANIMADVERSIONS ON SECTION VI.

THIS Section, we are told, "Sheweth, that Mr. Steven's answers to the Twelve Queries, are almost all evasions." It is supposed, "that the safety of his cause lay in evasive answers." † But the cause, pled by Mr. Steven, needs no such apology; neither can a writer, of his superior talents, for strong and conclusive reasoning, be much hurt, by such a mean and ungentle compliment.

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† Def. p. 77.

The attentive reader will, at once, see, that the whole of the Section, before us, is, evidently, a recapitulation, looking back upon the contents of the Letter, in general; and containing some loose hints, on the manner of answering all the Twelve Queries. The most of the things, therefore, contained in it, have been discussed already. It is hoped, however, that our saying so, will not be considered as an evasion: declining to do the same thing twice, is very different from declining to do it at all.

Concerning the complaint of evasion, which is the great burden of the song, in this part of the Defence, it is worthy of remark, that those very things, of which Mr. Fletcher himself is, most glaringly, guilty, are generally the things, concerning which he takes the very first opportunity to complain, in the most loud and clamorous manner. Evasion! Evasion! is the grand complaint. But, after carefully weighing matters, the unbiaſſed reader shall be freely left to judge, if it be not made by one, who, though he hath published a first edition of his Loyalist, then a second, with corrections, and considerable enlargements; and, after these, the Defence; yet, notwithstanding, hath, all this while, never written so much as one single sentence, directly on the subject in question; at least, on the subject, concerning which his opponents hold any sentiments, peculiar to themselves. We have seen it clear, as noon-day, that the subjection, for which the Loyalist hath, all along, been struggling, spending his whole strength, and exhausting all his stores of argumentation, is only a subjection, which his opponents never denied, in such cases of necessity; a subjection, which may, and must be yielded, under any existing government, obtaining the ascendancy; and a subjection, which, when yielded, leaves us as much in the dark as ever, with respect to what properly constitutes lawful authority, all circumstances being considered; what are the characteristics of that power, which we must consider as ordained of God, and to which we should be subject, for conscience' sake, on pain of condemnation; or what

is the description of a lawful command, which properly binds the conscience of a moral agent. On this ground Mr. Fletcher hath studiously shunned, to meet his opponents; though repeatedly called to close combat. With what face, then, can he speak of evasion? Let us see if he himself hath not, evidently, evaded all Mr. Steven's arguments, in general. That he hath really done so, shall be proved, from his own words. "I chuse not," says he, "to bear you company, in the disagreeable employment of groping in the dark, and in disputing about a scheme, which you affect to wrap in obscurity." And again, "I will not follow you through your whirlwind of noisy and vain declamation." † Let it be carefully observed, that though very different names be imposed; yet the same things are, evidently, the objects of attention, with both. What Mr. Steven reckons plain Scripture-doctrine; Mr. Fletcher, indeed, considers as a scheme wrapt up in obscurity: what Mr. Steven accounts fair solid reasoning; Mr. Fletcher calls a whirlwind of noisy and vain declamation: still, however, the same things are meant; though under very different names. Now Mr. Fletcher honestly declares, that he hath no intention of accompanying his opponent, in the consideration of these things. And he hath certainly been as good as his word. No doubt, it is rather disagreeable, to be severely tossed, by a strong whirlwind.

Another thing, deserving our notice, is, that Mr. Fletcher makes no proper allowance, for the different modes of reply; even supposing, ever so direct an answer, to his query, should come out, in end. Because his opponent doth not, as he would have him, answer immediately, yes, or no, to a question proposed, in the most loose, and ambiguous terms; he is highly offended. If his opponent will not just say, in so many words, 'Christ gave the Jews no allowance to kill Cesar;' all is wrong. If observations are made, for the purpose of throwing light on the subject, bringing the question

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† Def. p. 11, 12.

to a proper state, and preventing misunderstandings; anon, we hear the clamour of "Evasion—a bundle of erroneous and extravagant notions—putting one serpent in the room of another—a master-piece of evasion—things having no more respect to the query, than to the Popish doctrine of baptizing bells, and conjuring spirits—profound silence—a complete pass-over, as usual." † Whence it is evident, that Mr. Fletcher himself would require very remarkable indulgence, with respect to his peculiar mode of reply; which, ordinarily, is, just to call his opponent's arguments, and illustrations, by some different, and rather more forbidding names; and so to have done with them. With these general remarks, we might safely dismiss this Section altogether; and be less liable to reprehension, for overlooking it, than Mr. Fletcher is, with respect to his opponent's Letter. There are, however, still a few things in it, which may be noticed.

"In your answer to the first Query," says Mr. Fletcher, "you have not mentioned a single Covenanter, who refused to obey the King in things lawful, till he became an absolute tyrant." ‡ But the proper question is not, When our worthy Reformers first began, openly to refuse obedience, or to disown the existing authority; they themselves, Mr. Fletcher, and we, are all agreed in this, that it was their sin, and punishment, to bear the yoke of oppression so long as they did. The question is, What were, both sooner and later, the formal reasons of their totally rejecting the then authority? Their own words, as we have seen, assure us, that usurping a blasphemous supremacy over the church of Christ, and invading the civil liberties of the subject, were the grand hinges, on which the controversy always turned. And they had generosity enough, to account the former the more grievous of the two; rightly judging, that open dishonours, done to God, can never be properly punished by those, who are themselves deep in the trespass. I have been often, indeed, surpris'd to find, that

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† Def. p. 78,—96.

‡ p. 77.

our Seceding Brethren, when considering the reasons for rejecting authority, should lay so much weight upon acting the tyrant, by invading the civil rights of mankind; and so little upon the most glaring usurpation of the Redeemer's prerogatives, as sole King in Zion. That they are sincerely grieved, because of such Erastian encroachments, I charitably believe; still, however, they do not seem to allow them their due weight, as preponderating reasons, for disowning these earthly powers, who take too much upon them. Mr. Fletcher complains upon his opponent, for not mentioning a single Covenanter. Mr. Steven speaks of the Martyrs, in general, and plainly shews, on what reasons they proceeded. Particular Covenanters have now been mentioned, by name; † who totally rejected the then authority; upon, precisely, the same grounds, on which Dissenters state their Testimony. Many more could be mentioned, were it needful. But let our opponent first tell us, when Charles II. became an absolute tyrant. And then we shall be in readiness to answer, whether it was before, or after his becoming such, that the Martyrs rejected him. Let him favour us with the proper description of such a tyrant, as ought, indeed, to be resisted and rejected by men; and we shall take it very kind. For my own part, after striking from the bloody list, the monstrous, the murdering, and, to use Mr. Fletcher's dialect, "the infernal" Nero; I should be absolutely at a loss to find the tyrant, in Charles II. in James VII. or indeed in any ruler, that ever existed, under the sun; either in one period of their reign, or in another. Yet, according to our author's doctrine, Nero was not to be resisted, but on pain of condemnation. How comes it, then, that other tyrants, who are but as the dwarf before the giant, should, at any period of their reign, be resisted, rejected, or deposed? As to "obeying in lawful commands," the very ambiguous and evasive mode of expression, ordinarily used by Mr. Fletcher, and which properly ascertains nothing,

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† See above p. 69,—73.

with respect to the subject before us, neither *pro* nor *con*; I should reckon it a matter of very little importance, whether it be done before, or after, the ruler becomes absolute tyrant: for, if the question be fairly stated, I do not see, how there can be much harm in it, at any time:

Supposing it impossible for Mr. Steven, in answering the second Query, to exculpate Dissenters from the charge, of contradicting their principles, by their practice, Mr. Fletcher instructs his intelligent reader to ask, “Why do the Reformed Presbytery, and their followers, disown the British Government, and yet support it as much as any of their neighbours, by going to law, by paying land-taxes, toll, tribute, custom?”* Were I to retaliate, I might ask, Why do Seceders disown Prelacy and the Bishops’ Courts, in England and Ireland, and yet support them, as much as any of their neighbours, by the Church-payments there? And why does Mr. Fletcher maintain, that the positive command, as he understands the text, to pay the tribute unto Cesar, says nothing, either directly or indirectly, concerning the recognizing of his authority; † and yet suppose, that paying toll and tribute, in our times, necessarily implies a recognizing of authority?—But I find this part of the dispute discussed, at great length, by our worthy deceased friend, Mr. Steven, in his Second Letter, ‡ published since his death; to which I refer Mr. Fletcher, and the reader.—As to the charge, of borrowing hands from our good neighbours, to do what we will not do ourselves, || it hath long since been refuted, as a malicious calumny; and therefore merits no further attention. §

In the 80th page of the Defence there are two assertions, rather difficult to reconcile. “The question is not about the characters, but about the precepts in this passage.” And in the very next sentence but one, “The precepts in the first part of this passage, must not be

* Def. p. 78. † p. 82,—83. ‡ See particularly p. 7,—17.

|| Def. p. 79. § See Mr. M’Millan’s Let. p. 70.

be separated from the characters in the last part of it." If the precepts and characters be insparable; I should apprehend, that disputing about the one, would oblige us to dispute about the other, at the same time, and to take them in connection: as Mr. Fletcher himself, indeed, at the end of the paragraph, positively declares we should do. That great burden of the song, "Magistracy in the abstract," and the doctrine of our Testimony, concerning Cesar, which are again introduced, in the two following pages, have been animadverted on already.

Our grateful acknowledgments are due to Mr. Fletcher, for his concession, That the passage, *Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's*, says nothing, either directly or indirectly, about the lawfulness of his authority; and that it would be fool-hardiness to attempt a proof of it, from that part of Scripture. † This text hath all along been considered, by Seceders, as the great and impregnable bulwark, for the security of their principles, concerning owning lawful authority, and obeying lawful commands; but, according to the concession before us, it would be fool-hardiness to attempt a proof of the lawfulness of Cesar's authority, from that passage; consequently, the obedience, which it enjoins, even supposing that the words contain a direct command to pay the tribute-money, may still, for ought at least we can gather from the passage itself, be nothing more than that passive subjection to superior force, which necessity dictates, under any government, whether lawful, or unlawful. And indeed the Jews could never possibly owe any other sort of subjection unto Cesar. Hence it is evident, that our opponent's concession implies more, in favours of our cause, than both the editions of the Loyalist, and the Defence, put together, can ever make against it; in as much as it, evidently, saps the very strongest foundations of all the arguments, contained in these books.

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† Def. p. 82, 83.

Mr. Fletcher next speaks of "An article in the creed of the Reformed Presbytery, which," says he, "is exceedingly erroneous, or rather blasphemous. The diabolical article is this, That the accusers of Christ spake the truth, when they said, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cesar." † I am very sorry, indeed, that our opponent should thus confidently assert, at the expence of truth. But the honour of religion, and the defence of the cause, which I sincerely profess, oblige me, positively to aver, that there is no such article, as that mentioned, neither in the Testimony, nor in any other writings of the Reformed Presbytery, from beginning to end; nor any thing which bears the most distant shadow of resemblance unto it. I hope, "our witness is in heaven, and our record is on high," that we abhor even the most distant thought of admitting, that the accusers of the meek and lowly Jesus spake the truth, when they said, "We found this fellow perverting the nation." Yet this makes a part of the proposition. As to the following words, "and forbidding to give tribute to Cesar," Mr. Fletcher knows perfectly well, that the interpretation, given in our Testimony, refuses, that Christ either commanded, or forbade to give tribute to Cesar; but teaches, that he left the matter undetermined altogether, as he did in many other cases, of still higher importance; when he found the question put, not for the sake of receiving information, but for the purpose of ensnaring him. Declining to answer the captious question, agreeably to this interpretation, whether it be reckoned right or wrong, is very different from clearly deciding it, and positively forbidding to give tribute to Cesar, as the false accusers maintained he did. The text, Luke xxiii. 2. is cited in the Testimony, solely for the purpose of proving, that the Jews themselves did not understand the words of Christ as a command to pay tribute; though this would certainly have suited the prejudices of some of them, and been subservient to
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their wicked design. A single word, however, there is not in all the Testimony, on the question, Whether these accusers, in their charge against Christ, spake the truth, or spake falsehood; though the latter was certainly the case: and it can be said in full consistency with every iota of our principles. With regard to that rather singular mode of expression, “diabolical article,” Mr. Fletcher, had he thought it proper, might, for the sake of the English reader, have given us the translation, and told, that the Testimony of the Reformed Presbytery contained “a blasphemous and devilish article.” If the candid reader should have been struck with surprise, at the harshness of the expression; he might have assured him, that it is used by “a Seceder, who fears God, and who will not render evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing; and who will not offer strange fire on God’s altar, lest he be consumed.”!

On what follows, concerning the approved examples of the saints, * it would be altogether superfluous to detain the reader, after what hath been said already. † Only, I cannot help remarking, on Mr. Fletcher’s very uncandid and abusive manner of quoting from his opponent. He introduces Mr. Steven saying, “Neither Mr. Thorburn, nor the Reformed Presbytery, reject the approved example of the saints in Scripture; but they prefer Scripture-precept to the approved example of the saints.” ‡. As these words are distinguished by the ordinary quotation-marks, the reader would certainly expect to find them in Mr. Steven’s Letter. The first part of the sentence, it is true, we have, p. 109, 110. But the last part of it, “They prefer Scripture-precept to the APPROVEN example of the saints,” is no-where, in all the Letter, to be found; nor indeed any thing like it. Mr. Steven’s words, and they are the only words, in his reply to the 8th. Query, which Mr. Fletcher can possibly have in view, stand exactly thus: “Mr. Thorburn, in your
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* Def. to p. 87. † See above p. 66,—68. ‡ Def. p. 86.

quotation means no more, than a preference of Scripture-precept to the example of the saints, as the divine standard of all practice, contrary unto, or inconsistent with which no example of the best saint is of any consequence." * So soon as Mr. Fletcher shall shew us the error which this doctrine involves, he may expect to be attended unto; till then, we must be allowed to consider it as perfectly orthodox. The attentive reader will discern at once, that, in order to blind him, and give an entirely different turn to the state of the question, the word APPROVEN is artfully foisted into this part of the sentence, by our opponent.

Speaking of Mr. Steven's answer to the ninth Query, Mr. Fletcher proceeds, " Instead of saying a single word to this Query, you insult your own, and the understanding of every sensible reader, by a railing accusation against the Loyalist, as a teacher of the doctrine of passive obedience, and as adducing the passive obedience of Christ, as an example having the force of a precept, and binding the consciences of Christians to the despotic authority of cruel tyrants. Enough," continues he, " has been said in the preceding pages to refute this calumny." † As we have only bare assertion here; it is equally easy for me to reply, while the impartial reader shall be left to say, if it be not just, That enough has been said, in Mr. Steven's Letter, and in the preceding pages ‡ of these Animadversions, to fix, not indeed the calumny, but the just charge, upon the Loyalist; beyond the possibility of exculpation. That the Redeemer's meekness, under suffering, exhibited a noble pattern of patience, and humble submission, unto all his people, when they are persecuted, afflicted, tormented, and find no way of escape, is readily granted, on all hands. But that his holy submission, in that awful situation, was ever intended as a determining standard, whereby we are to ascertain that obedience, which is due, for conscience' sake, to lawful civil authority, is what can never be proved." Mr. Fletcher,

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* Let. p. 109. † Def. p. 87, 88. ‡ See from p. 40,—48.

indeed, hath been wise enough not to attempt it. Only, to keep himself in countenance, he raises a mighty out-cry about the sin of reviling the pious Mr. Henry: * a matter, concerning which, he had not the least occasion to speak a single word; in as much as his opponent never dropt the most distant hint, injurious either to the memory, or the doctrine of that great man. Mr. Steven, so far as ever I could learn, put as high a value upon Mr. Henry, as ever Mr. Fletcher needed to do; while, in full consistency with his own doctrine, he could, chearfully subscribe every word of the quotation, alluded to. "The dead," says our opponent, "are very harmless antagonists, they cannot take unto them the buckler and the shield." It is very true: and, agreeably to his own doctrine, we should have expected, that Mr. Fletcher might spare the dust of Mr. Thorburn, many years ago, laid in the grave. But perhaps he "only intended to smite surviving brethren through the loins of a dead man, who could not arise and wipe off the reproach." † In the two following pages, there is nothing, which we have not already considered, except the remarks, about supporting our political principles, so much by Acts of Parliament, and so little by the Word of God.

Mr. Steven had said, "The Reformed Presbytery believe, that they support their political principles wholly by the Word of God, even when they call in the aid and authority of Acts of Parliament." ‡ And had assigned his reasons. Mr. Fletcher reckons this inconsistent, and asks, "If your political principles are wholly supported by the Word of God, pray Sir, what need is there to call in the aid of Acts of Parliament to support them?" † The one, however, is no contradiction to the other. Mr. Fletcher and his brethren, it is hoped, support the evangelical doctrines, which they believe, profess and maintain, wholly by the Word of God, as the alone infallible judge, by which all controversies in religion are to be ultimately, determined; is it, therefore,

* Def. p. 89. † *ibid.* ‡ Let. p. 124. † Def. p. 91.

fore, contradictory and absurd, to call in the aid of Confessions and Catechisms; in order to express, by these mediums, their adoption of the precious doctrines contained in the Word, and their seasonable application of these doctrines, to their own case, in their church-capacity? I should suppose not. No more inconsistent is it for us, to consider the Holy Scriptures as the alone infallible standard, by which our political principles are to be, ultimately, ascertained, judged, and supported; and, at the same time, to testify our approbation of the Reformation-Acts of Parliament, and our strict adherence unto them; as agreeable unto the Word of God, and as the great human bulwark, or outward defence, of our civil and religious liberties. Taking the revealed will of God, as the only sure foundation, or warrant, for all our principles, whether in our civil, or religious capacity; and yet calling in the subsidiary aid of human deeds, for protecting, and securing unto us the possession of these principles, doth not appear to involve any contradiction.

If we are not to call in the aid of human decrees, and Acts of Parliament; I should like to be informed, how Mr. Fletcher himself came by that civil part of the British Constitution, which he highly approves, and how he ascertained the will of his favourite PRIMORES REGNI, in excluding a Popish Pretender; and securing the crown to the House of Hanover, on certain specified conditions. In regulating his views of these matters, he will find himself obliged to act, upon the very same general principle, with Dissenters, in calling in the aid of human laws. He must, no doubt, apply the principle, to a different object. The Reformation—Acts are our auxiliaries; while the Revolution-Acts are his. But we both agree, in the general principle, of seeking aid from human authority, or public national deeds. Let our opponent, therefore, give the same liberty to others, which he takes to himself; and this part of the dispute is over.

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The Loyalist goes on, to inform us, "That his political principles are built upon the foundation of the Apostles' and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." † Had Mr. Steven, or any of the Reformed Presbytery, said so; I am afraid, he would very soon have been told, that he was making magistracy, or politics, "as much a gospel-ordinance as preaching the Word and baptism." Certain it is, that in all the writings of Dissenters, there cannot be found a single sentence, which favours so much of doing so. Is the Loyalist also among these, who find magistracy in the Word; who view the necessary qualifications of the civil ruler, and the indispensable duties of his station, clearly prescribed, and particularly specified there? No, surely; but, rather than drop the employment of contradiction, he must, it seems, do and undo, say and gain-say, just as occasion requires. If Dissenters maintain, that magistracy is instituted in the Word; then he must tell them, that such doctrine "is pregnant with absurdities." If they refer to Acts of Parliament, in passing which men may be considered as acting, according to the dictates of right reason, though in consistency with the Word; then the Loyalist, who calls these dictates the law of nature, in which magistracy is founded, is, forthwith, ready to aver, "that he will not pay such a poor compliment to the Holy Scriptures, as to call in the assistance and authority of human decrees, for the support of his political principles." † Yea, in some unguarded hour, when he is not perhaps, remembering what he hath said against Dissenters, he will teach nearly, if not exactly their doctrine, complaining upon the "modern advocates for toleration of gross heresy, blasphemy, &c." because they "teach, that Christian magistrates should govern their subjects, not by the Word of God, but by the law of nature. It is true," says he, "that the ordinance of magistracy, and that the relation between magistrates and subjects, are founded in the law of nature; but it is impious to

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† Def. p. 92.

‡ *ibid.*

conclude from this, that the Christian magistrate should prefer the smoking flax of the light of nature to the burning and shining lamp of the revealed will of God; that he should not have a copy of the written law of God, and read therein all the days of his life, lest he should be a Judaizer. This doctrine leads to Deism, to a rejection of our Bible." † Very good Dissenting doctrine; and expressed almost in the same words, which they have often used. They can readily allow, with Mr. Fletcher, that magistracy is founded in the law of nature; while they also teach, that it is founded in the law of Scripture; because they consider these as substantially the same. But the light of nature, by which we have some faint discernment of the law, is, indeed, a very weak taper, unassisted by Revelation.

In the same page, Mr. Fletcher tells his opponent, "you have not, because you could not, mentioned a single text in the Sacred Volume, to prove that it is your duty to disown the authority of Christian Magistrates, who are a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well. You durst not attempt to prove your political principles from the Word of God, because it would have been an attempt to prove, that rebellion, which is as the sin of witchcraft, is authorized in the Holy Oracles." The reader will, no doubt, be rather surprized, to hear Dissenters blamed, by the same author, and at the same time, both for finding "magistracy instituted in the Word;" and for "not attempting to prove their political principles from the Word." Such strange things, however, are common, in the Defence. The Loyalist may thus go on, so long as he pleaseth, to insult Dissenters, by imposing upon them his own absurd, and self-contradictory states of the question; but so soon as he can shew, when or where, they ever taught any such doctrine, as that which he here complains they have not attempted to prove; I hope, they shall be in readiness to adduce the Scripture-proofs. Till then, they will reckon themselves excused, from
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† Pref. to his Compend of Brown's Letters on Toleration, p. 4.

faying any thing farther, than what hath been said already, on that part of the subject. As to the beloved theme, “that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,” it is vast pity, that neither Mr. Fletcher, nor any of those who have dwelt most upon it, seem properly to advert to the scope of the passage, from which the assertion is taken. It is not the supposed rebellion of a people, contending for the purity of God’s ordinance of magistracy; and, even when they cannot obtain it, in such state as they would wish, resolving, through grace, to live peaceably with all men, as is the case with Dissenters: no; it is the rebellion of a king, against the expressly revealed will of God; the stubbornness of a prince, in rejecting the word of the Lord, acting contrary to the Scriptural and fundamental laws of the kingdom, on the footing of which he, and every king in Israel, was to receive and hold his crown, and making forbidden encroachments, on the spiritual liberties of the church, by presuming himself to offer a burnt-offering; though that work belonged not at all to him, but to ecclesiastical persons, called, and appointed of God, for that purpose. This is the rebellion, evidently, intended; and declared, by the Spirit of God, to be as the sin of witchcraft.* So that this text, in place of making against Dissenters, is directly for them; and, taken in its true spirit and scope, will bear them out; in the support and defence of all their political principles.

Concerning Mr. Steven’s complaint upon the Loyalist, “for relinquishing the whole of the civil part of our Reformation;” † it is observable, that, as usual, the Loyalist never so much as touches one of the reasons, or illustrations, which his opponent had offered, in support of the allegation; but, instead thereof, raises a very loud out-cry against him, for “throwing the dirt of calumny, and murdering his neighbour’s character.” ‡ A very short, and ready way, of dispatching an argument. Had not Mr. Fletcher himself assured us, “that he will not offer strange fire on God’s altar, nor render rail-

* 1 Sam. xiii. 9,—14. & xv. 23. † Def. p. 92. ‡ p. 93.

railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing;" there are some things, in the part of the Defence before us, which would almost tempt his reader, to form a different opinion. Mr. Steven is here represented, "as murdering his neighbour's character, under pretence of defending the truth, which is said to be no less criminal, perhaps, than the offering of human sacrifices to God." The necessary inference, with respect to Mr. Steven, is abundantly obvious.—But I shudder at the thought! and refuse from the painful task of mentioning it.

Expressive of his humility, and the sense which he had of his own weakness, Mr. Steven had granted, "that he was not blessed with a happy capacity of expressing his thoughts in a narrow bounds." † "It is a truth," says Mr. Fletcher, at the top of this page. The confession, from Mr. Steven, was, evidently, an indication of great modesty, and diffidence; somewhat resembling the Apostle's acknowledgment, that he was rude in speech; and less than the least of all saints. For Mr. Fletcher to take the advantage of it, and add his amen, is such a glaring instance of ungentle, and ill-bred treatment, as is seldom to be met with, amongst Christian writers; and, indeed, is rather below notice.

The mighty triumph over Mr. Steven, in this and the following pages of the Section, as though he had, "in one sentence, demolished the study and labour of ten years, and given up the cause to his antagonist," happens to be rather premature; being, evidently, founded, before the victory be obtained, or indeed the most distant appearance of its ever being so. The confession is, "The Scripture-examples prove, that the saints, in case of necessity, may be subject to tyrants and usurpers in all things lawful, and yet be blameless." If so, says Mr. Fletcher, "Is it not a fair and unavoidable conclusion, That saints may be subject, in all things lawful, to Christian magistrates, who are neither tyrants nor usurpers, and yet be blameless?" Most certainly: and what Dissenters ever either said, or thought, otherwise?

† Let. p. 127.

wife? But when all this is granted, they have not renounced so much as a single iota of their avowed principles. The subjection, conceded, is only such as "necessity" dictates, and as may be yielded to tyrants and usurpers, who, on account of a people's sins, may be permitted to have dominion over their goods, and their cattle; and to bring them into great distress: but it has no connection with the recognizing of the ruler's title, nor with ascertaining the lawfulness of the conditions, on which he receives, and holds his crown. While these are out of the question; the doctrine, taught by Mr. Steven and his brethren, stands untouched.

Our opponent also exhibits here, another specimen of the blessing, which he renders for railing. "The intelligent reader," says he, "will easily see, from the preceding pages, that the leading features of your Answers to the Twelve Queries, are mere evasions, misrepresentations, calumnies, contradictions, vain and nauseous repetitions, raising the ghost of passive obedience and non-resistance almost in every page." Beginning to read his opponent's Letter, he finds himself "presently falling in among invectives, calumnies, and silly evasions." † As the bare rehearsal, it is presumed, may be sufficient, to give the reader an idea of Mr. Fletcher's peculiar way of blessing; I shall not, after what hath been said above, trouble him with any farther remarks.

At the end of the Section, Mr. Steven is told, "Sir, your passionate outcries against the Loyalist, signify that he hath touched you to the quick." ‡ With respect to this, it shall be freely, and without the smallest apprehension for the consequence, submitted to the unbiassed and judicious reader, on what side the passionate outcries are loudest; and, consequently, where we have the strongest evidence, of being touched to the quick.

† Def. p. 96.

‡ p. 97.

ANIMADVERSIONS ON SECTION VII.

THIS SECTION, it is said, “ Sheweth, that Mr. Steven’s arguments are altogether insufficient to support his cause.” The Loyalist means now “ to act offensively, and to combat the Reformed brethren, with weapons of their own framing.” Certain premises are mentioned, and considered as exhibiting Mr. Steven’s doctrines, and arguments; then we are told, that even supposing these to be true, this, and the other thing, cannot be inferred from them. †

That not one, in ten, of Mr. Steven’s arguments, is ever so much as mentioned, in this short Section, the attentive reader will see at once; but how they can be shewn to be inconclusive, without speaking a single word about them, either good, or bad, will probably remain a mystery to every man, except the Loyalist himself. It is observable, that even some of the premises, here mentioned, are not to be found at all, neither in the Testimony, nor in Mr. Steven’s pamphlet. As to the things, which, it is said, will not follow; it is a matter of no importance, in this controversy, whether they follow, or not. They are, generally, at least, such things as we never either thought, or said; yea, some of them are things, which we very much abhor. But let us meet the fatal weapons of this offensive war.

“ If it were true, as your Testimony plainly teaches, that Christ forbade the Jews to give tribute to Cesar, you cannot conclude, from this, that tribute is not due to the British Government.” Ans. We have proved before, that the Testimony teaches no such thing. And whether we give, or do not give tribute to the British Government, it says nothing about recognizing the ruler’s authority; Mr. Fletcher himself being judge; for if a positive command, to give tribute to Cesar say nothing even indirectly, concerning recognizing his authority;

† Def. p. 97, 98, 99.

thority ; obedience to such a command, must necessarily say as little. † “ Supposing it to be true,” proceeds our Author, “ that Cesar had a just title to all that was due to an usurper, idolater, and murderer ; you cannot infer from this, that the British Magistrates are usurpers, idolators, and murderers, and therefore that—a halter, or a gallows is their due.” We never entertained the most distant thought of either saying, or inferring any thing of the kind ; nor has this any more connection with our doctrine, than inferring from it, that the sun rises in the West. If Cesar was, indeed, a tyrant and a murderer, as history fully vouches ; what we natively, infer is, that Cesar could have no just title to the conscientious obedience of the Jews, as their lawful sovereign : the opposite of which Mr. Fletcher maintains ; else, his reasoning is nothing to the purpose. But he goes on, “ If it were true, as you say, That Christ did not recognize the power of Cesar as lawful ; it cannot follow, that the authority of the British Magistrates is unlawful.” Be it so : yet it both can, and must follow, that the text makes nothing for Mr. Fletcher’s purpose † for if it prove nothing concerning the lawfulness of Cesar’s authority ; why does he continually produce it, as a proof, that the present British Rulers are lawful Scriptural magistrates, and ought to be acknowledged as such ? That this text ascertains nothing, in support of Mr. Fletcher’s cause, is the just, and the only inference, which, in this dispute at least, we need, or mean to draw from our view of it. As to the next inference, “ That the British Magistrates are as bad as the Roman Cesars,” it also is a doctrine, with which we have no concern, having never taught any thing like it ; and therefore we return it to the inventor, to be disposed of, as he may find occasion. Mr. Fletcher’s opponent must still be told, “ If it were lawful, as you very unwarrantably have affirmed, That we should pray for violence and the vengeance of the Almighty, to be inflicted upon our persecutors to the uttermost ; you cannot reasonably

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† See above p. 118, 119.

conclude from this, that our civil rulers are persecutors, and that it is lawful to pray for damnation to them." On reading this I can scarcely refrain from the Psalmist's exclamation, "Wo is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar. My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace!" How our friend, Mr. Fletcher, can satisfy his own conscience, when he thus, knowingly and deliberately, perverts the words of his opponent; and, under the sanction of quotation-marks, fathers upon him doctrines, which never once entered his mind, nor dropt from his pen, it is hard to say. "That we should pray for violence, and the vengeance of the Almighty, to be inflicted on our enemies to the uttermost," is a doctrine, to which Mr. Steven ever was, and to which all his surviving Brethren still are absolute strangers." † Nor can they, without just abhorrence, admit even the most distant thought of the unchristian, and abominable inference, concerning praying for damnation to the present civil rulers. I hope they can, through grace, pray, that the Lord may, in mercy, forgive Mr. Fletcher, and every other man, who supposes them capable of any such thing. In full consistency with all their principles, and with the safety of their own conscience, they can pray for bodily health, saving grace, and everlasting happiness, unto those who are advanced to be rulers in the nation, as well as unto all others; though they have no clearness to subscribe to the footing, on which they hold, and exercise, their regal power. Our opponent proceeds: "If it were a fact, as you say, without the shadow of proof, That our noble army of Covenanters and Martyrs, rejected the authority of the tyrannical royal Brothers; you cannot, with any shadow of reason, infer from this, that the British King is a tyrant, and that his authority should be disowned." To this I reply: We have now given, not the shadow, but the substance, of incontestible proof, that many in the noble army of Covenanters and Martyrs, totally rejected the authority of the tyrannical
royal

† See above p. 84,—88.

royal Brothers, both in civil, and ecclesiastic matters. † It is only of late, indeed, that Seceders themselves have begun to deny it. But they are now convinced, it would seem, that the acknowledgment of it must ruin their cause; as certainly it would: for the martyrs were always but a very small minority. As to the inference, "That the British King is a tyrant," it is no-where, so far as I remember, to be found, in all the writings of Dissenters. Mr. Fletcher himself being the contriver; he alone is accountable, for the propriety, or impropriety, of drawing it from the premises. If Dissenters speak of disowning authority; they tell, both in what sense, and for what reasons. ‡ With regard to Mr. Fletcher's peculiar manner, of giving other names to strong arguments, and close reasoning, which he either doth not chuse to combat, or perhaps cannot very easily overturn, calling them, as here, "calumnies, contradictions, falsehoods, and misrepresentations," and so dispatching them at once, or telling us what cannot follow from them; it hath been animadverted on already, and deserves no further reply. To give the finishing stroke; Mr. Steven is told, "You yourself, Sir, must see, if you are not voluntarily blind, That your cause is built on the sand." If it be, indeed, so; there could be no proper occasion for Mr. Fletcher to spend so much time, and make so many furious assaults, in order to batter it down. He might have left it to fall, under its own weight. It is rather surprizing, indeed, that a fabric built on the sand, should have stood so long. It hath not, certainly, been for want of tempestuous storms, beating against it.

That we may know how Mr. Fletcher means to act, for the future, he tells his opponent, "If you should write five hundred volumes on ridiculous and extraneous subjects, a silent contempt will be the reply of the Loyalist. But if you begin, for you have not yet begun, the matter in debate, which is precisely this, Whether obedience is due to the present civil British Govern-

ment,

† See above p. 70,—75.

‡ p. 53.

ment, in its lawful commands or not; the Loyalist hath no objections to see it out with you, if the Lord give time, ability, and opportunity." † The much respected Author, to whom this language is addressed, is no more, to answer for himself: he hath already both begun, and finished, all that ever he had to do, in this world. But surviving Brethren may reply for him. If once Mr. Fletcher begin, for neither he, nor any on his side of the dispute, have ever yet begun, to define the terms, and explain the state of the question; some Dissenter or other may, likely, undertake to meet him, on his own ground. But while he goes on, transgressing the very first, and most obvious, laws of all sound reasoning, sheltering himself under terms of doubtful signification, and using them in the most loose and ambiguous manner, without ever deigning to drop a single hint, for explanation; I shall not say "contempt," for I reckon that unbecoming a Christian; but a "silent" bearing of the abuse, will probably be the reply of Dissenters. Pray, what sort of obedience is intended by Mr. Fletcher? Is it passive submission to those public burdens, or general taxes, which are laid upon the subjects, by superior power; and levied, without asking any question, for conscience' sake? Is it simply doing those things, which, for the matter of them, are good, and agreeable to the moral law; whether the powers, in being, require them, or not? Or, is it a direct and proper recognizing of the authority; by openly approving of the conditions, on which it is held and exercised; consenting to the lawfulness of the constitution, by which only it can be supported; and solemnly professing or swearing, if required, to be faithful, and bear true allegiance to the sovereign, as the power ordained of God, to whom we must be subject for conscience' sake, and under pain of condemnation? Let him tell us, what he understands by the obedience for which he pleads; and what it, necessarily, implies. We must also have an explanation of the term, "Present civil British Government."

Does

† Def. p. 100.

Does it mean the whole complex system, in all its essential parts, taken as an united whole; and called, The British Constitution? Or, are we to consider Mr. Fletcher himself, though an avowed enemy to Magistracy in the abstract, as abstracting the merely civil parts of the constitution, respecting the life and property of the subject, from that very first foundation-stone, and ground-work of the whole fabric, "That whosoever shall hereafter come to the possession of this crown, shall join in communion with the church of England as by law established?" And, agreeable to this, he shall be considered, "As the head and supreme governor of the national church;" viz. of England; "the DERNIER RESORT in all ecclesiastical causes; an appeal lying ultimately to him in chancery from the sentence of every ecclesiastical judge." † Does Mr. Fletcher include, or exclude these; when he speaks of the British government? By the fundamental, and solemnly ratified laws of the nation, they are inseparably connected with the other essential, and component, parts of the constitution. Or, different from all these, are we to understand him, as meaning the persons in power? But, if so; whether are they to be considered simply as men; or as men clothed with official character, holding, and exercising magistratical authority, solely on the footing of the united British Constitution? Let our opponent explain himself; if he expect to be attended unto.

Perhaps forgetting that he had, no farther back than the last paragraph, thus cautioned his antagonist, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off;" Mr. Fletcher taketh unto himself the buckler and shield; and, having girded on his harness, with all the consequential airs of a Philistian-Champion, challenges his opponent, "Here, Sir, the Loyalist once more defies you, or any other man, to prove,—That it is the duty of Christians to disown the authority of Christian Magistrates, under whose government they enjoy their natural, civil, and religi-

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† BLACKSTONE.

ous privileges, and may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty." † Our friend, Mr. Fletcher, however, if he had thought it proper, might have saved himself the trouble of this bold defiance; till once he had shewn us, in what part of their writings, Dissenters ever taught any such doctrine. So soon as he can tell, where they have asserted; they will, likely, be able to tell, how they can prove. So far are they from disowning such government; as properly answers to the above description, that earnestly contending for it, is one of their distinguishing characteristics. Making violent encroachments on the royal prerogatives of Christ, as sole King in Zion, and infringing the spiritual liberties of his people, have ever been exhibited by them, as their greatest complaints, against the constitution of the government. Whether or not these complaints be just, Mr. Fletcher, and the reader may see, by consulting Mr. Steven's Posthumous Letter, "Remark II. Concerning the Erastianism of the present times." As to living a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty; the disciples of Jesus, as lambs in the midst of wolves, may, through the grace of God enabling them, conduct themselves in a peaceful and inoffensive manner, in as far as the matter respects them, even under tyrants and usurpers; and, much more, under rulers, comparatively mild and gentle; yet holding and exercising their power, on conditions, destructive of the religious liberty, wherewith Christ hath made his people free.

† Def. p. 100.

ANIMADVERSIONS ON THE CONCLUSION.

THE attentive reader will easily perceive, that this part of the Defence is mostly transcribed, in a very servile manner, from the Loyalist. Proceeding in the form of inferences, from the doctrine taught in the body of the Book; we are not to expect proof, for the very grievous charges it contains; accordingly, we are troubled with none. One thing, very noticeable, is, that a spirit of the most bitter invective, though strongly blamed by Mr. Fletcher when found in others, breathes, with increasing vigour, in every sentence of this Conclusion. The pen, which was dipt in gall, at the writing of the Title-page, is kept in constant employ, till the concluding sentence be finished. Here the Reformed Presbytery are represented "as holding up some of the plainest precepts of the law of Christ, to the derision of infidels.—Their senseless exposition of Rom. xiii. 1,—7. is," we are told, "a manifest token, that they have departed from the faith once delivered to the saints, and are following cunningly-devised fables.—'The Reformed Brethren,'" it must be seen, "are not going forth by the footsteps of Prophets, of Apostles, and of Christ." Even all this will not suffice; it must be added, "The best apology, which a Reformed Presbyterian can make for paying tribute, or for an involuntary way of sinning, may be expressed in the words of the Syrian general to the prophet Elisha: *When I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.*" † If the reader discern, in these sayings, and there are many more of the same kind, in the few pages of this Conclusion, that charity which thinketh no evil, a disposition to render blessing for railing, and the meek spirit of those, who, when they are reviled, revile not again; his penetration, I must confess, is far beyond mine.

Whether

† Def. p. 101,—103.

Whether or not, our exposition of Rôm. xiii. 1.—7. be a senseless exposition; and whether we pervert, and hold up to the derision of infidels, or give the just meaning of these plain precepts, to which, in the course of this dispute, our attention hath been called, must now be submitted to the decision of the discerning and impartial public; as we are not, likely, for a time at least, to say much more on some of them, than what we have said.

“The distinction,” says Mr. Fletcher, “between a voluntary and involuntary way of paying tribute, is a most ensnaring distinction.”* That, like many other necessary, and important distinctions, it is capable of being strained, and perverted, especially by such a writer as our opponent, will be readily granted. But is it not a just distinction? Mr. Fletcher hath often sent us to the land of Egypt, to learn conscientious obedience unto lawful authority. Pray, was it voluntary, or involuntary obedience, which the sons of Jacob yielded, under the iron rod of their oppressors, when they served with rigour, fulfilled their daily tasks, and, at the expence of insupportable fatigue, gave in, as nearly as possible, the full tale of the bricks, even when straw was denied them? But I am, happily, prevented from detaining the reader, on this topic, by the very full description of it, in Mr. Steven’s posthumous Letter. † With respect to Mr. Fletcher’s illiberal and ungentle banter, concerning such things, as he supposes might be done, under the sanction of this distinction; ‡ it proceeds wholly upon the footing of manifestly abusing the term, as a pretext for doing things, which are, in their own nature, positively sinful, being direct violations of the moral law; and, therefore, can have no connection with the doctrine of Dissenters, on this head. When they, at any time, speak of involuntarily yielding to some things, which are not objects of choice; they, uniformly, mean only such things, as are, in their nature, innocent, and do not necessarily involve a breach of the divine law; though, with respect to the
prin-

* Def. p. 102. † p. 8, — 13. ‡ Def. p. 102, 103.

principle from which, the manner, and the degree, in which they are required, it may be humbly apprehended by them, that the persons in power act, without a proper scriptural warrant, and go beyond their commission.

It is expected, “the intelligent reader will see, that the Reformed Brethren are very justly denominated, **THE ANTIGOVERNMENT PEOPLE.**” † Since the commencement of our dissent from the public deeds of the nation, we have openly, and uniformly, taught, that civil magistracy is a precious ordinance, appointed by God, as the Great Creator of heaven and earth; for promoting his own glory, and the happiness of human society. We, every year, publicly, refuse to hold communion with such, as deny this divine institution, in New Testament-times. We have, all along, contended for the Scriptural purity of civil government. We openly manifest our earnest desire to see it settled on the same ancient, and honourable footing; on which it stood, in the days of our forefathers. And, even while we cannot obtain this, we endeavour to live peaceably with all men, giving no disturbance to our neighbours, but seeking the welfare of human society. If the reader be intelligent, and mean to see, that such a people deserve the epithet of **ANTIGOVERNMENT**; he would require some better evidence, than what is exhibited, in either the *Loyalist*, or the *Defence*. Because the first Seceders found, and declared, that the ecclesiastical judicatories, of that time, were not lawful, nor rightly constituted courts of Christ; and so declined their jurisdiction over them; ‡ did this say, that the Seceders were **ANTIGOVERNMENT-MEN**, in respect of ecclesiastical authority? Or, that they refused obedience to the just commands of lawful church-rulers? I suppose, they would not thank us, for saying so. No more consistent can it ever be, to call us **ANTIGOVERNMENT-MEN**, in respect of civil authority; merely because we find, and declare, that the present rulers hold, and exercise their power, on conditions, which appear unto us to be
sinful,

† Def. p. 103.

‡ See their Declination, given in to the Assembly, May 17th. 1739.

sinful, whether you suppose our opinion to be right, or wrong; and because we declare, and assign our reasons for it, that the High Courts of Parliament are not rightly constituted. Let Seceders, then, do unto others, as they would wish others to do unto them; and we shall never more be troubled with the malicious epithet, ANTIGOVERNMENT. †

It is next supposed, "That if the principles of the Reformed Brethren, about the civil government of Great Britain, were reduced to practice, all civil and natural relations among mankind, would be dissolved, and the whole world be a Babel of confusion.—The servant may disown the authority of his master, and run away from his service; the son may disown the authority of the father that begat him, and of the mother that brought him forth; and the wife may disown the authority of her husband, may leave his bosom, and become another man's wife. Where is the master, the parent, or husband, who doth not want this, and the other Scriptural qualification?" ‡ Strange reasoning, to be sure! Pray, what are our principles? Have they not, uniformly, been, That, according to the law of God, and the once fundamental laws of the kingdom, all places of power and trust, from the highest to the lowest, in the nation, should be filled, on warrantable conditions of advancement; and by men, properly qualified, men professing the true Presbyterian religion, fearing God, hating covetousness, a terror to evil doers, and the praise of them that do well? What would the reducing of these principles to practice be? In the ordinary sense of language, at least, it would certainly be, Actually filling the several places of power and trust, in the manner now described. Would this turn the whole world into a Babel of confusion? "No, indeed," it will be granted; "but when you cannot obtain this state of things;

† On the inconsistency of applying this epithet to Dissenters, see the Letter, addressed to the Burgher-Committee, by Mr. McMillan of Stirling, p. 18, 19, 20.

‡ Def. p. 104.

things; you dissent, enter your public protest, here is the danger! and testify against filling the places of power and trust, in any other manner; leaving the majority of the nation, who have invested the authorities, in their own way, also to support and defend them, in their own way; while you, it cannot be refused, still live peaceably, and wish to submit only to such things, as are not inconsistent with your public dissent, and open profession." Be it so. The first Seceders found, that the places of religious trust, in the church, were not, at that time, filled in such manner, as they reckoned indispensibly necessary, both by the Word of God, and Reformation-Acts of Assembly; they, therefore, protested, seceded, and refused subjection to the prevailing party, in power; except upon such conditions, as the other would never grant. Was this calculated to dissolve all religious connections, and subordination, in the church? Did it warrant the dissatisfied individual, on every whimsical pretence, to decline the authority of his own Session; the Session to deny their subordination to the Presbytery; the Presbytery to disregard the deeds of the Synod; and the Synod to counteract the decisions of the General Assembly? The party, seceded from, no doubt, both thought, and said so; but the seceding party, I suppose, would not like the inference: no more reason have we, either to like or to admit it, in the other case. That civil government, and ecclesiastical government, are specifically different, and that different qualifications are requisite, for filling the respective places of trust, we readily acknowledge. At the same time, it cannot be denied, that the Word of God, and Reformation-laws, prescribe and enjoin, with equal pointedness and precision, concerning the qualifications of the one, and of the other. But even supposing it were not so; still the general principle is not affected: if public dissent and testimony, have a native tendency, to dissolve civil relations, in the state; public dissent and testimony must, upon the same principle, have a native tendency to dissolve religious connection, and subordi-

subordination, in the church. "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?"

However specious Mr. Fletcher's reasoning on this head, may, at first glance, appear; the attentive reader will soon discern its fallacy. In order to make the cases parallel; one of two things, or both, must necessarily be supposed: either, that these relations, mentioned, are attempted to be forced upon a person, without any proper reason for doing so; or else, that, being already actually formed, something is done, altogether inconsistent with the nature of the relation, and subversive of the very ends, for which it was formed. In such cases, I should not be much astonished, to hear of disowning, or dissolving. Were a servant to be forced to put himself under the authority of a master; upon conditions, which he could by no means approve, and to which he found it impossible for him, conscientiously, to consent, suppose for less wages than he was willing to take, or could live by; where would be the absurdity of refusing such a man for his master? Or, if the relation were already formed, by mutual consent, but the master oppressed his servant, deprived him of his wages, and openly violated the paction between them; who could blame him, though, in such a case, he run away from his service? In like manner; were a son forcibly required to own for his father, a person, who never begat him, and with whom he wants to have no concern, and to subject to the authority of a mother, who never brought him forth; would it be any surprize, to find him rejecting the proposal? Or say, they were his real parents; but have become cruel as the ostrich, deny him his subsistence, beat, and abuse him; why should he not be allowed to decline such jurisdiction? As to the case of the wife; it is no less obvious, that no woman could ever be expected to receive, for her husband, a man, who is not the object of her choice; or to enter into the conjugal relation, upon conditions, which she could, by no means, approve. Supposing, on the other hand, the relation to be voluntarily formed; but she, afterwards, finds her husband, openly and habitually, violat-

violating the marriage-covenant, and taking others into his bosom; would she be to blame for leaving it? Two of these three cases, viz. that of the servant and master, and that of the wife and her husband, may, if properly attended to, serve to illustrate the subject before us; as these relations, like that between magistrate and subject, are formed by mutual consent, and proceed on the footing of a pactio*n* between the parties. But the other case, of parent and child, hath little, or no, resemblance; seeing, in the forming of that relation, the child is wholly passive, and hath neither will, nor say, in the matter. Accordingly, unless he verily mean to teach the doctrine of passive-obedience, and to plead the cause of slavery; Mr. Fletcher should no more speak of the relation, between the parent and child, as being parallel to that, between the prince and the people. With respect to requisite qualifications; to want "this and the other qualification," is one thing: and to want the very first and principal qualifications, which the Scriptures expressly require, and which the formerly fundamental and solemnly ratified laws of the kingdom, have made essential to the enjoying of regal dignity, is another. The former will likely be the case, while we are in this imperfect state; for the latter, there is no necessity, but what arises out of our grievous backsliding from the righteous ways of God; for which backsliding it becomes neither Seceders nor Dissenters, to make any apology.

I am aware, we shall soon be told, that we have compared the British Rulers to the cruel and unrighteous master, and to the faithless husband; this, however, is neither necessarily implied, nor really intended. It may indeed be the case, with respect to some things; and it may not be the case, with respect to others. But wherein we mean the parallel to hold, as to all rulers in general, is chiefly this. As the above relations, cannot be properly formed, unless by mutual consent; and as, without that, the parties should not be forced upon each other; so is it, in the case of the king, and his subjects: and, as these relations have their stipulated conditions, which must be, mutually, agreed upon, as

the foundation of the obligation, to perform the respective duties, which the parties owe to each other; so should it be, with respect to these rulers, whom we are required to own. Those, who deny this, will be found, in spite of all defence, to plead the cause of slavery: while those, who grant it, will easily discern, that Dissenting principles have not the remotest tendency to dissolve either natural or civil relations amongst men. Nay, it is presumed, that the respective duties, of these several relations, were more faithfully, and conscientiously performed; when all ranks, in this nation, generally, adopted, and solemnly swore to maintain, the very same principles, for which Dissenters still contend; than what they are now, amidst all the new light, which mankind have got.

Would Mr. Fletcher allow himself, calmly and candidly, to consider the matter; it is presumed, he could not but see, that all societies, in general, great and small, civil and ecclesiastic, proceed upon the same general principle, for which Dissenters contend. The qualifications for membership, and conditions of advancement into office, may be rather of a different kind; they may be more, or fewer: but where is the corporation of any kind, which hath not some prescribed qualifications, not simply declared to be useful, providing they can be found; but positively insisted upon, as so indispensably necessary, that, without them, there is no admission into the society; nor any participation of its privileges and honours? If you maintain, that whatever sort of qualifications might be desirable, and exceedingly useful, if they could be obtained; yet none ought to be stood upon, as essentially necessary, for filling the places of public trust in a nation; then, with a witness, you lead the way, for turning the whole world into a Babel of confusion; you stab the very vitals of every society upon earth. But if you grant, that, although not those for which we plead, yet some qualifications should be insisted upon, as indispensably necessary; learn them from the law of nature, the law of Scripture, or from what other quarter you please, let them be few, or let them be many; you go on the same
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general principle with ourselves; and leave us room to draw the same inference, which you wish to father upon our doctrine. Suppose you positively insist on no other conditions than simply protecting the natural lives and civil liberties of the subjects, and administering common justice amongst them; instances can be given, in which even these have been totally wanting. But if standing upon qualifications, which the existing ruler doth not actually possess, be introductive of anarchy in one case, how is it not so, in another, even granting the respective qualifications should be rather different, in kind, or number: For illustrating this, we need not look farther than the monstrous Nero. Here is a prince, who, instead of protecting the natural lives of his subjects, slaughtered them by hundreds, and made their blood to run like water, merely to satiate his own infernal cruelty. In place of defending their liberties; he kept his best subjects, and oftentimes his nearest friends, under a system of constant terror, till matters arrived at such a pitch, that one companion durst scarcely be seen speaking with another, for fear of immediate impeachment. In the room of common justice, he plentifully administered poison, the halter, and the consuming flames. † Would it have been unreasonable, in this case, to have stood on the few conditions last mentioned; and to have solemnly protested, that Nero, who thus hated right, should no longer reign? Or would it have been more proper, to have argued thus: “However desirable it would be, to find our prince possessing those qualifications; yet, seeing he actually has them not, we must take him as we find him; lest we should incur the guilt of holding principles, which, if reduced to practice, would dissolve all relations among men, and turn the whole world into a Babel of confusion?” The ancient conditions of advancement to regal dignity, in this nation, were, amongst other things, “That, before the King’s majesty who now is, or any of his successors, shall be admitted to the exercise of his royal power, he shall assure and declare, by his solemn oath, under his

† See the Annals of Tacitus.

his hand and seal, his allowance of the National Covenant, and of the Solemn League and Covenant, and obligation to prosecute the ends thereof, in his station and calling. And shall agree to Acts of Parliament fully establishing Presbyterian Government, the Directory for Worship, Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as they are approved by the General Assembly of this Kirk, and Parliament of this kingdom, in all his Majesty's dominions; and that he shall observe these in his own practice and family; and that he shall never make opposition to any of these, or endeavour any change thereof." † The conditions of advancement now are, amongst other things, "That the prince be of the Hanoverian line, being Protestant; that he join in Communion with the church of England as by law established; and that he support and maintain Prelacy inviolable, in England and Ireland." How comes it, that the former conditions, positively insisted upon, in the time of Reformation, and still contended for by Dissenters, lead to the dissolution of all relations amongst mankind; while the later, no less positively insisted upon now, are fully consistent with "preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations?" Is it merely, because the former are supposed to be done away; whereas the later really exist, by the will of those, who act as representatives of the nation? Still the question recurs: How came they into existence; without teaching such doctrine, "as tends to turn the whole world into a Babel of confusion?" Had it not been, that the above seems still to be considered, as the greatest, and most formidable objection, on which both Burghers, and Antiburghers, chiefly insist, in all their writings, and discourses, against Dissenters; I should not have said so much upon it here.

In opposition to what he finds, in Mr. Thorburn's Book, our opponent goes on, to declare, "It is a downright falsehood, That the true religion is for ever excluded from the British Constitution." ‡ The farther

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† Parl. 1649. Sess. 2. Act 15.

‡ Def. p. 104;—105.

we proceed in this dispute; the more reason we see, for always being careful to define our terms. How forbidding does it look, to find two parties of professing Presbyterians, both wishing to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, or two respectable gospel-ministers, giving the lie, the one to the other! This would have been prevented, at once, in the case before us, by explaining the term TRUE RELIGION. When Dissenters, in managing this controversy, speak of the true religion; they mean, as their worthy ancestors did before, The true Protestant, Presbyterian, and covenanted religion, as it is to be found delineated in the Word of God, summarily comprehended in our subordinate Standards, and solemnly sworn to, in our National Vows to the Most High God. That this true religion, formally considered, is, for ever excluded from the British Constitution, by the publicly ratified Articles of the Union, and other fundamental laws of the kingdom, is a stubborn, and incontrovertible fact. But Mr. Fletcher, by the true religion, must understand the Protestant religion, taken in a loose and vague sense, and comprehending alike both Prelacy and Presbytery, as opposed to Popery. Unless he have "unhappily got into the strong-hold of religion in the abstract;" and not as it is openly professed and practised, in the land. There have been Seceders, who themselves allowed, "That under the present Constitution, a mighty bar is thrust into the way of our Covenanted Reformation, both in Church and State; yea, a grave stone is laid and established upon the same." And, "That the Body-Politic have never, by their deed of civil constitution, provided that their Magistrates be brought under, and admitted upon obligations and terms, such as were fixed upon and established in reforming periods, but such as are, in many respects, not only different from, but destructive of the same, unto the great prejudice of REAL RELIGION, and reformation in the house of God." † Even this is somewhat like an exclusion of that,

† Decl. & Def. of Princ. p. 51.

that, which both they and we seem to have understood by the true, or real, religion. But, says Mr. Fletcher, "The King is obliged by oath, to maintain, to the utmost of his power, the laws of God, the true profession of the gospel, and the Protestant religion." † Why has he not added the remaining words of the very same sentence, as it stands in the coronation-oath, *viz.* "established by the law?" No doubt, the attentive reader would then have seen, at once, that Prelacy, in England and Ireland, and a sort of Presbytery in Scotland, were intended by the Protestant religion, which the King swears to maintain; and, consequently, that the covenanted uniformity, solemnly sworn unto, in the time of Reformation, was for ever excluded and destroyed. Had Mr. Fletcher also condescended to exhibit before his reader the next question and answer, in the coronation-oath; it would have made the matter quite plain. "Will you preserve unto the bishops and clergy of this realm, and to the churches committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges as by law do or shall appertain unto them, or any of them?—King or Queen. All this I promise to do." But we must also be told, by our opponent, "It is no less false, that the profession, preservation and maintenance of idolatry, are the essential conditions of holding the supreme, or any civil power in these nations." As Dissenters have sufficiently explained themselves, on this head; Mr. Fletcher cannot but know, that by idolatry here they understand the will-worship and superstitious ceremonies of the church of England. That the maintenance of these is one essential condition of holding the supreme power, he will not, surely, deny. Times have been, when Seceders themselves did not think very favourably of this condition. "At the Union 1707," say they, "a further, and very lamentable step of defection was made, in our civil settlement; in regard the maintenance and preservation of the Hierarchy and ceremonies of the church of England, is a fundamental and essential article of the said Union

† Def. p. 105.

Union." * If either our opponent, or the reader, suppose idolatry to be a false charge, upon the church of England; it might not be amiss to recommend unto their serious perusal a sermon entitled, "Prelacy an Idol, and Prelates Idolaters: All Prelatists, Maintainers of, and Compilers with Prelacy, charged with Idolatry, and proven guilty." †

"The Loyalist," we are next informed, "has no ill-will at the people called Old Dissenters." It may be so. Perhaps his pen has been guided by some sudden gust of passion, rather than by his prevailing disposition. It is not our province, neither shall we presume, to tell, what are the real sentiments of his heart. But had we proceeded by the general rule, That out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh; we should, certainly, have been led to a conclusion, rather unfavourable: Such striking appearances of spite, resentment, and deep-rooted prejudice, as those with which the Defence is fraught, will seldom, I apprehend, be found, in so small a compass. Even the Loyalist himself, furrly as he looks, is mild, when compared with his Defender. As to "disloyalty, and turning rebels to government, from a pretence of piety, supposed to be the most effectual scheme, which even the Devil himself could recommend, for blasting the honour of religion;" ‡ I hope, Dissenters shall be directed and enabled, freely to forgive Mr. Fletcher, for laying any such thing to their charge.

We are very solemnly cautioned, to beware of "reviving the ancient and hellish calumny against the city of our God, That—it is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces." † A good advice can never be unseasonable, if it have a proper object; but, pray, what doth our friend's arguing reprove? If he mean, that we should not give any real ground, for rational, and unprejudiced men, to bring a charge, of this kind, against the church and people of God; we heartily concur with him; and are not conscious of being any
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* Decl. & Def. of Prin. p. 50,—51. † By Mr. Fraser of Brae.

‡ See Def. p. 105. † p. 106.

more blameable than our neighbours, on this score. But if he mean, that we should neither do, nor say any thing; which may be, readily, misrepresented, and shamefully perverted, by the malevolent enemies of the church, such as were the calumniators, who anciently raised this cry; it is much the same as to say, that we should not be valiant for the truth upon the earth: for it is certain, that the testimony of Jesus hath always been tormenting, unto the carnal world. The truth ever hath found, and to the end of time, likely, will find malicious opposers; ready to say of even the most harmless disciples, "These, who have turned the world upside-down, are come hither also." Notwithstanding the generous, the mild, and gentle conduct of the meek and lowly Jesus; even HE was condemned by his accusers, as a perverter of the nation, and an enemy to Cesar. The disciple need not expect to be above his Lord.

Before he part, the Loyalist, it seems, must in his own way, testify his friendship for his opponents. "The Reformed Presbytery, and their followers," says he, "will not think it a compliment, nevertheless the Loyalist cordially wishes, that the fire of their misplaced, though well-meant zeal, about civil government, may be extinguished; and that the veil of ignorance and prejudice may be removed from their minds."—† In this, I presume, Mr. Fletcher hath rightly judged. Dissenters have certainly much more reason to consider his parting with as an insult, than as any compliment. Its meaning may, perhaps, be good; but it has a very surlly countenance. In these days of Jacob's trouble, Dissenters, as well as others, have more need to improve, than to extinguish their zeal, for the declarative glory of God, and the best interells of human society. What they may be left to do, in the hour of temptation, it is not their's to say; they have much to fear, but nothing to boast. In dependance, however, on the God of their
fathers,

† Def. p. 106, 107.

fathers, they wish to live and die, endeavouring to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

After a declaration, that if the Lord shall be pleased to bless the Defence, for preventing opposition to the truth, the labour will not be in vain; Mr. Fletcher concludes with a, seemingly, solemn wish, that Mr. Steven “may never more be employed in publishing falsehoods, contradictions, misrepresentations, and malignant insinuations;—that he may no more pervert and abuse the Scriptures of truth for defending a cause which is altogether indefensible; and that his tongue may be, not as a spear and arrow, to slay the reputation of his neighbour; but as choice silver, to speak forth the words of truth and soberness.” † The pen, dipt in the bitter gall, must still be employed, to bid his opponent adieu. The concluding words, indeed, are smooth; but they are closely attended by very haggard and forbidding companions.

After carefully perusing his Letter, and seriously reflecting on what, as it is well known, he uniformly delivered, in his discourses from the pulpit, the candid and unbiassed public shall be freely left to determine, whether or not Mr. Steven ever published any such things, as are here ascribed unto him. Hundreds, whose testimony will be reckoned as valid as either Mr. Fletcher’s or mine, can attest, that he never, while in life, prostituted either his tongue, or his pen, to publish so much as one of those things, which are contained in this very grievous, and totally unfounded charge. Now, that he hath finished his course, fought the good fight, and, as we may charitably suppose, laid hold on eternal life; none can be any more in danger from him. Meanwhile, if Mr. Fletcher, or any other for him, will venture to specify one single falsehood, that ever was published by our deceased friend; some Dissenter, or other, it is hoped, will be found to shew becoming respect unto the memory of the dead; who can no more take unto himself the buckler and shield.

But I am now heart-sick of following our Author, so long, and through such a very dreary road. I feel disposed to drop my pen for ever, in this controversy; if it is any more to be managed, in the manner of the Defence. Were questions to be fairly stated, terms carefully explained, and the argument conducted with a christian spirit; light might be thrown upon the subject, and information received even from the disagreeable employment of taking different sides. But if these are not to be attended unto; I should reckon it much better to drop the dispute altogether; and spend our leisure-hours, if leisure-hours we have, in some more profitable exercise. Ministers are certainly set for the defence of the gospel, and of all the precious doctrines, contained in the Scriptures at large, whatever divine institution they respect. Called, by their adored Master, to promote the best interests of his kingdom; they should never unfaithfully conceal the words of the Holy One, upon any subject; but be valiant for the truth, in all its branches. Notwithstanding, if we are not allowed to have any precise subject, or distinct question, on which we are to give our opinion; but must follow our opposers, through a multiplicity of doctrines, which we never once called in question, and concerning which we hold no opinions peculiar to ourselves; why should we thus labour for nought, and spend our strength in vain?

Having endeavoured to state the question, and divest the dispute of many things, which appear quite foreign to the subject; if any reply is to be made; I hope, I shall be allowed to insist, that the arguments, such as they are, which have been advanced, in these Animadversions, shall be fairly met. If it be thought, that they are not to the purpose; let this be proved, and illustrated. If they are found weak; the task of overturning them, will be the easier. If any of them should happen to be strong; it would be more honest, to acknowledge it, than to pass them with a sneer.— Let it, therefore, be understood, that unless we are to

meet in fair combat; I shall reckon myself, from henceforth, excused, in paying no attention, to what may be advanced, on the other side.

It is, in our times, a mournful truth, that there are many real differences of opinion, amongst the professing disciples of Jesus. Very few, I believe, will be found, in any society, who cordially agree, in the same sentiment, concerning either the doctrine, worship, discipline, or government of the New Testament church; though these are, surely, very plainly taught us, in the sacred Oracles. With respect to the nature, and proper tendency of the several Reformation-attainments, in the last century, the diversity of opinion is no less striking. At the same time, it is sufficiently obvious, that the differences are often multiplied, and exceedingly aggravated, by misunderstanding, or misrepresenting each other. Against this, therefore, we should all be careful to guard. It brings much dishonour upon the common cause of Christianity; gives great occasion unto our adversaries, to load even the gospel of peace, with reproach; and confirms the avowed infidel, in his false opinion, that even the most zealous professors of religion believe not in its reality, any more than he. It is humbly apprehended, that, through the divine blessing, it might also be of no small advantage, amidst our rending divisions, were we all, seriously, to concur, in considering, and lamenting over them, as an awful token of the Lord's righteous displeasure; a melancholy proof, that he hath, in a very sensible manner, "forsoaken his house, left his heritage; and given the dearly beloved of his soul into the hand of her enemies." Surely it is for a lamentation, on gospel-Lebanon, "that the Great Shepherd, provoked by our sins, hath cut asunder his staff, even bands, that he may break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel." Reflecting on this, we have much reason to say, with the weeping Prophet, "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth
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the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!"

May the God of Peace, who alone can do it, Turn to his people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent; dispose the professors of religion, to love the peace and the truth, in close connection; and hasten the glory of the latter day, when the multitude of those who believe shall, again, be of one heart, and one soul.

T H E E N D.

